United Nations A/58/209

General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 August 2003

Original: English

Fifty-eighth session
Item 93 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Macroeconomic policy questions: specific actions related to the particular needs and problems of landlocked developing countries

Transit environment in the landlocked States in Central Asia and their transit developing neighbours

Note by the Secretary-General**

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly, as requested in its resolution 55/181 of 20 December 2000, the report prepared by the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on the transit environment in the landlocked States in Central Asia and their transit developing neighbours.

* A/58/150.

** The present report was submitted late owing to the heavy workload in connection with the preparations for the international ministerial meeting on transit transport cooperation.

03-45151 (E) 030903

Summary

The transit environment in the landlocked States in Central Asia and their transit neighbours is characterized by inadequate infrastructure and several forms of non-physical bottlenecks. To some extent, the density of the existing road and rail networks is sufficient to meet the region's transit transport needs. However, the quality of that infrastructure is inadequate primarily owing to lack of maintenance. Inadequacy of bogie change facilities at border points between the landlocked States and their non-Commonwealth of Independent States neighbours and insufficient cooperation between national railway companies increase bottlenecks on some rail corridors. Capacity is also reduced by the age and poor quality of the rolling stock for both road and rail transport. The density of the pipeline network is inadequate. Pipeline links, notably to the Islamic Republic of Iran, China, the Caucasus and Turkey, are needed. Likewise, trans-Caspian waterway links to the Caucasus need improvement. The efficiency of the transit environment is also hindered by non-physical bottlenecks relating essentially to complicated border-crossing and administrative procedures, which vary from one country to another. Many initiatives are under way to improve the transit environment in the region. They include continued efforts by the landlocked States and their transit neighbours to improve the infrastructure and reduce non-physical barriers to transit transport through national laws and increased regional and international cooperation. The initiatives under way need to be complemented by new actions, including further harmonization and simplification of transit procedures and documentation, increased use of information technology to speed up border-crossing procedures, increased efforts to reduce barriers to trade and transit transport, measures to strengthen regional cooperation and policies to promote the private sector.

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I. Background

1. In its resolution 55/181 of 20 December 2000, the General Assembly took note of the report prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the transit environment in the landlocked States in Central Asia and their transit developing neighbours and considered that the problems of transit transport facing the Central Asian region need to be seen against the backdrop of increased trade and capital flows and advancement in technology in the region.

2. The General Assembly recognized that, to be effective, a transit transport strategy for the region should incorporate actions that address both the problems inherent in the use of existing transit routes and those associated with the early development and smooth functioning of new alternative routes. It welcomed in that context the further cooperation of landlocked States with all interested countries and emphasized the importance of strengthening international support measures to address further the problems of the newly independent and developing landlocked States in Central Asia and their transit developing neighbours.

3. The Assembly invited the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Governments concerned, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and relevant regional and international organizations and in accordance with approved programme priorities and within existing financial resources, to continue to elaborate a programme for improving the efficiency of the current transit environment in the newly independent and developing landlocked States in Central Asia and their transit developing neighbours.

4. The Assembly also invited UNCTAD, in close cooperation with the regional commissions within their respective mandates and current resources, as well as with other relevant international organizations, to provide technical assistance and advisory services to the newly independent landlocked States in Central Asia and their transit developing neighbours, taking into account the relevant transit transport agreements.

5. Furthermore, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in close cooperation with the regional commissions, to prepare a report on the implementation of resolution 55/181, to be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

II. Economic situation

6. The Central Asian landlocked developing countries cover an area of 4 million square kilometres and have a total population of 57 million inhabitants. In 2000, the five countries had a total gross domestic product (GDP) of $32,595 million, of which Kazakhstan accounted for 55.9 per cent. Output is fairly well distributed between the major economic sectors. However, the share of agriculture in GDP is declining, while that of the service sector is on the rise.

7. The region is geographically diverse and rich in mineral resources. However, adequate development of those resources is hindered in part by high transport costs

because the countries are landlocked. Any successful development strategy for the region has to place a priority on improving the transit environment. Such a strategy should be broad and must include actions aiming to achieve effective regional integration and enhance international cooperation. Sustained economic growth in the region also requires continued structural reforms and appropriate macroeconomic management.

A. Macroeconomic performance

8. Central Asia is a region with great potential. However, income levels are currently low. GDP per capita is lower in all five landlocked States than the average of developing countries.

Table 1
Basic indicators of the Central Asian landlocked developing countries

	Land area (Thousands of km²)	*Population in 2000 (Millions)*	*GDP (Millions of United States dollars)*		*GDP Index, 2000 (1990=100)*	*GDP per capita in 2000*
			1990	*2000*		
Kazakhstan	2 717.3	16.2	40 304	18 230	45.2	1 127
Kyrgyzstan	198.5	4.9	2 951	1 304	44.2	265
Tajikistan	143.1	6.1	4 339	991	22.8	163
Turkmenistan	488.1	4.7	8 129	4 404	54.2	930
Uzbekistan	457.4	24.9	23 673	7 666	32.4	308

Sources: UNCTAD, *UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2002*; World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

Table 2
Sectoral distribution of output

	Rural population as percentage of total population		*Sectoral distribution of GDP (Percentage)*							
			Agriculture		*Industry*		*Manufacturing*		*Service*	
	1990	*2000*	*1990*	*2000*	*1990*	*2000*	*1990*	*2000*	*1990*	*2000*
Kazakhstan	46	44	27	9	45	43	9	18	29	48
Kyrgyzstan	62	67	34	39	36	26	28	6	30	34
Tajikistan	66	73	33	19	38	26	25	23	29	55
Turkmenistan	53	55	32	27	30	50	-	40	38	23
Uzbekistan	59	63	33	35	33	23	-	10	34	42

Sources: UNCTAD, *UNCTAD Handbook of Statistics 2002*; World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

9. Recent trends in key indicators suggest that the region continues to recover from the economic recession it experienced in the 1990s. The average annual growth rate of GDP was 20 per cent in Turkmenistan, 11 per cent in Kazakhstan and 9 per cent in Tajikistan from 2000 to 2002. Performance was more modest in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (table 3).

Table 3
Growth rates

	Annual percentage change in real GDP		
	2000	*2001*	*2002*
Kazakhstan	9.8	13.5	9.5
Kyrgyzstan	5.4	5.3	0.5
Tajikistan	8.3	10.2	9.1
Turkmenistan	17.6	20.5	21.2
Uzbekistan	4.0	4.5	4.2

Source: ECE, Project LINK Forecast Tables, April 2003.

10. Despite that encouraging performance, output was far below its level in 1990. GDP declined by 57 per cent in the region as a whole from 1990 to 2000. Tajikistan, which was hit the hardest by the recession, lost 77 per cent of its output during that period. Good performance is forecast for the next few years. However, moderately high inflation, unstable current account balances (except in Uzbekistan), government budget deficits (especially in Kyrgyzstan) and public debt[1] constitute risks to sustained growth.

B. International trade and integration into the global economy

11. The economies of the region have achieved a relatively high degree of openness. In 2000, the ratio of total trade to GDP varied from 81 per cent in Uzbekistan to 147 per cent in Tajikistan. The region's average was 38 per cent higher than that of developing countries. The international trade sector generally outperformed the rest of the economy in the 1990s. For the region as a whole, exports grew by an average annual rate of 9 per cent from 1995 to 2000. Performance could be better if transport costs were lower. High transport costs reduce the competitiveness of landlocked developing countries. In particular, they have caused the Central Asian landlocked developing countries to lose to Turkey part of their traditional agricultural produce market in Russia.[2]

12. While imports are fairly diversified, exports are dominated by a few products. In 2000, oil accounted for 81 per cent and 53 per cent of export revenue in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, respectively. Lack of diversification makes export earnings and overall economic performance sensitive to variations in the price of that commodity. In fact, the strong growth the two countries have enjoyed over the last few years was due in part to increases in the price of oil.

13. The Russian Federation is the most important trading partner of the Central Asian landlocked developing countries. It accounted for about 33 per cent of those countries' trade in 2000. But the situation is evolving. The share of Russia in the region's trade had followed a downward trend in the 1990s, while those of Western European countries, Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran and China had followed an upward trend.

14. The Central Asian landlocked developing countries are also making progress with regard to other aspects of integration into the global economy. The region

receives significant inflows of financial resources in the form of foreign direct investment and official development assistance. In 2000, the ratio of foreign direct investment to GDP was 4.6 per cent, which was 24 per cent higher than the average in developing countries. Kazakhstan was the favourite destination of the foreign direct investment flows, with 85 per cent of the region's total, representing 7 per cent of its GDP. Endowment in natural resources and openness to trade are factors that attract foreign investment. In Kazakhstan, more than 80 per cent of foreign direct investment inflows are intended for the oil industry. However, the fact of being landlocked and the instability in some areas in the region have kept the Central Asian landlocked developing countries below their potential capacity to attract foreign direct investment.

15. Foreign direct investment flows into the Central Asian landlocked developing countries declined by 39.5 per cent from 1997 to 2000. Part of the decline was due to the fact that some pipeline projects that had been planned to start at the end of the 1990s had been put on hold. The trend seems to have been reversed in 2001, when foreign direct investment inflows rose by more than 100 per cent.

16. Official development assistance increased in the region by 45 per cent from 1995 to 2000. In 2000, official development assistance per capita averaged $14 in the Central Asian landlocked developing countries, which was 50 per cent higher than the developing countries' average. Nonetheless, official development assistance inflows to the region are inadequate in regard to the needs of those countries. Being landlocked, the Central Asian landlocked developing countries are in greater need of assistance than countries of comparable income level that have access to the sea. Moreover, they are newly independent countries that need assistance to establish the bases of their socio-economic development.

III. Transit environment in Central Asia

A. Overview

17. The transit systems serving the Central Asian landlocked developing countries are a matter of interest to countries from China to Turkey and the Caucasus, and from Russia and other European countries to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The region has a mix of European, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Asian systems. The Russian Federation is the principal transit country for the Central Asian landlocked developing countries. However, the region's transit trade is expanding southward towards the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, eastward towards China, and westward towards Turkey and the Black Sea region.

18. The transit environment in the region is helped by the economic recovery in the landlocked States and the region's resolve to open up to international trade. China's recent accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) has positive effects on the regional trade and the transit environment. However, there are also factors that undermine the transit environment in the region. In particular, the instability in Afghanistan denies transit options to the south.

19. The Central Asian landlocked developing countries are trying to improve the transit environment, notably by improving their transport and communications

infrastructures and the legal, institutional and administrative frameworks of their transit systems and by intensifying regional cooperation. The five countries and some of their transit neighbours are members of an increasing number of regional integration arrangements that include CIS and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). They also participate in regional transport programmes such as Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA)[3] and the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).[4]

20. The transit environment is also favoured by positive cooperation between the landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours. China, which has a 3,300-kilometre border with the Central Asian landlocked developing countries, increased its share in those countries' trade from 2.4 per cent in 1995 to 4.7 per cent in 2000. China has been making efforts to intensify trade with the region, primarily with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In particular, it is interested in buying crude oil from Kazakhstan, with which it signed an agreement in 1998, allowing a Chinese company to participate in the development of oil resources in western Kazakhstan. China stands to benefit from improvement in the transit environment in the region because it can use the landlocked developing countries as transit countries for trade with CIS countries, Turkey and Europe.

21. *Afghanistan and Pakistan*. When the situation stabilizes in Afghanistan, transit routes through Afghanistan and Pakistan can be reopened. Then, Karachi can play a greater role as a transit port for the Central Asian landlocked developing countries. Pakistan's link to the region will be consolidated when the project to build a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan is implemented.

22. *Turkey*. Turkey accounts for about 4 per cent of the total trade of the Central Asian landlocked developing countries. It is actively contributing to the development of transport infrastructure in the region. Notably, it is a stakeholder in the United States-led Baku-Tbilisi-Djeikahan pipeline project. Turkey, which is planning to join the European Union, can strengthen its position by increasing trade with the Central Asian landlocked developing countries and become the Union's principal link to the region.

23. *Islamic Republic of Iran*. Trade between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Central Asian landlocked developing countries is weak but growing fast. Its share in the landlocked States' trade is currently about 3 per cent. Turkmenistan is its principal trading partner among those States. The Islamic Republic of Iran is also intensifying cooperation with all countries in the Caspian region, which has a positive impact on the transit environment.

B. Transit infrastructure

24. In previous reports, the Secretary-General gave a detailed description of the existing transit transport routes and pipelines that serve the Central Asian landlocked States, as well as a list of projects and programmes aiming to improve the transit environment in the region. Although most of the projects and programmes are being implemented, no major change has occurred in the transport infrastructure.

25. Currently, the transit systems serving the Central Asian landlocked developing countries are dominated by Russian ports and corridors through the Russian Federation, the so-called northern corridors. Other corridors, notably the western

and southern corridors, are gradually gaining strength. The coordination of regional and intraregional road and rail networks is ensured by international organizations, including ECE, ESCAP and ECO.

1. Port facilities

26. Adequate port facilities with modern technology and equipment are available in the transit countries, which are primarily Russia, Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some of the ports have been undergoing extension and upgrading since 1996.

2. Road infrastructure

27. The main transport routes are corridors between Central Asia and

- Countries in Europe via the northern route through Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Poland and Germany
- Countries in Europe via the southern route through the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey and the Balkans
- Iranian seaports in the Persian Gulf and Turkish ports in the Mediterranean.

28. The density of the existing road networks in the Central Asian landlocked developing countries and most of their transit developing neighbours is sufficient to meet the basic transit traffic needs of the region. Nonetheless, intensification of the networks is necessary to reduce bottlenecks. In particular, links to China, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey should be increased.

29. In general, the quality of the existing infrastructure is not adequate, despite efforts to comply with international standards. In many cases, the roads are narrower than recommended by international agreements, or are not properly built, or lack maintenance. In addition, a good number of bridges on those roads are in poor condition. Nearly one out of 10 bridges in Kazakhstan needs urgent repair. Furthermore, most of the roads are not adequately equipped with road signals, as required by international conventions. Finally, the stock of vehicles is old and lacks maintenance. Most of the vehicles do not comply with international regulations.

3. Rail infrastructure

30. The rail network includes routes between Central Asia and

- Russian and Chinese Pacific ports for container cargo
- Turkish and European Mediterranean ports through Kazakhstan for container cargo
- The Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk for container cargo
- Seaport and markets in the European countries via TRACECA routes for container and bulk cargo
- Europe through Turkey, Bulgaria, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan for import by traditional rail shipments
- Baltic ports through Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and the Baltic States for container and bulk cargo.

31. Three fundamental problems are encountered in the rail transport sector. First, the rail infrastructure needs repair and upgrading on most of the corridors. Secondly, the rail gauge is not the same in the landlocked States as in their non-CIS transit neighbours. Transport between CIS and non-CIS countries requires bogie changes and transshipments. Such operations take up to four hours to be completed. Lastly, the rolling stock is old. As a result, container trains cannot exceed the speed of 36 kilometres per hour on some corridors.

4. Pipelines

32. Pipelines are clearly in inadequate supply, which limits the export and production capacity of the two oil-rich countries, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. All available pipelines, with the exception of the Baku-Tbilisi-Batumi pipeline, go through the Russian Federation. There are several projects to build new pipelines, as was indicated by the Secretary-General in previous reports. But many of those projects are still waiting to be implemented.

5. Waterways

33. The ferry systems on the Caspian Sea from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the Caucasus region are quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate. Bad infrastructure and poor management make the ferry systems less competitive than rail or road transport. Nonetheless, transport on trans-Caspian routes has great potential in the long run. Black Sea ports are the closest to most parts of the Central Asian landlocked developing countries. Links to such ports should be developed.

C. Transit transport issues

1. Basic legal instruments for international consignment

34. International conventions provide the basic legal instruments for international consignment in conjunction with national laws. International road transport is generally regulated in the Central Asian region by the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road, to which most countries in the region have acceded. Rail transport is regulated by two conventions, the International Consignment Note for Rail Transport under the Convention Concerning International Carriage by Rail and the Agreement on International Carriage of Goods by Rail of the Organization of Railways Cooperation. The latter agreement is applied in CIS countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran and China. The International Consignment Note for Rail Transport is applied in Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran and European countries. At border points between countries where different instruments are applied, the waybill is reproduced from one format into the other.

2. Institutional and human resource development

35. Border facilities are inadequate and are not equipped to deal with current transit transport needs. Joint customs facilities are recommended to facilitate customs control procedures. However, such facilities do not exist in the region except at some border points between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Border posts are sometimes separated by as much as 2 kilometres. Similarly, most countries do not use the UNCTAD Automated System of Customs Data

Management (ASYCUDA). Only Armenia, Georgia and the Islamic Republic of Iran have installed the system.

36. Border-crossing formalities are very complicated and often include multiple inspections through several layers of barriers. Sometimes the procedures take days to be completed in CIS countries. In the case of road transport, customs convoy operations in Russian territory can cost three to four days' waiting time for trucks. Likewise, visa regulations for Turkmenistan require five to 12 days. The situation is about the same for rail transport where border-crossing formalities take days to be completed (compared to 30 minutes in the European Union), although a TRACECA study indicates that a maximum of 120 minutes is needed for such procedures.

37. Customs documents are complicated and not harmonized, while border-crossing procedures vary from one country to another. Although most of the Central Asian landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours participate in various regional integration arrangements, free movement of persons and goods has not been achieved and the border-crossing procedures now applied do not meet the countries' obligations pertaining to those arrangements.

3. High transport costs

38. Transport costs are generally three times higher in landlocked developing countries than in developed countries. They exceed 50 per cent of the value of imported merchandise in the Central Asian landlocked developing countries. An important part of those costs is due to border-crossing formalities and transit fees, which vary considerably from one country to another. Countries with high average transit fees per kilometre travelled include Tajikistan ($1.30), Georgia ($0.86), Uzbekistan ($0.70) and Turkmenistan ($0.61). Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey charge no formal transit fees. In addition to official fees, there are informal payments both at the borders and along the corridors. According to some studies, unofficial fees paid by a trucker between Kyrgyzstan and Siberia can exceed $1,500.[5] Those multiple fees inflate transport costs and undermine the efficiency of transit transport.

39. Other cost drivers can be linked to time loss at the borders. Waiting time could be reduced if information technology was used. The lack of proper organization also leads to costs that could be avoided. For example, generally export goods are transported by rail, whereas imported manufactured goods are transported by road. That distribution of the freight results in empty backhauls, which is inefficient. Another consequence of the sector's poor organization is the absence of transporters' associations through which transport operators can protect themselves against illegal practices, such as corruption and rent-seeking. The latter remain serious problems that plague the functioning of most administrative bodies in the region, including those relating to the transit transport sector.[6]

4. Political instability and conflicts

40. The Central Asian region has not been free of conflicts for the past three decades. Major areas of conflict have included Tajikistan, Afghanistan and the Caucasus region. There are also minor disputes among the landlocked States. Nonetheless, the situation is improving, in particular in Afghanistan. The stabilization of the situation in that country is generating hope that regional projects, including the Turkmenistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project, will be implemented.

5. Insurance

41. There is no regional insurance scheme applied by all Central Asian States, although the idea of introducing a scheme similar to the European Green Card system has received some support. Lack of regional insurance complicates transit procedures and increases costs. For instance, trucks travelling through Kazakhstan must buy local insurance even if they are covered by other insurance schemes. That practice forces transporters to buy insurance in all the countries through which they transit.

IV. Measures under way to improve the transit environment in Central Asia

42. The landlocked States and their transit neighbours continue to make efforts to reduce physical and non-physical barriers to transit transport by taking various initiatives at the national and international levels and by showing their commitment to regional cooperation. Such efforts are supported by the international community, which has initiated several programmes with a view to increasing the efficiency of transit transport in the region.

A. Measures to improve the transit infrastructure

1. In the landlocked States

43. A relatively large number of projects are under way in the landlocked States to improve the transport infrastructure networks.

44. In 2000 Kazakhstan launched a national transport network development programme for the period 2001-2008 that includes construction of new infrastructure sections and rehabilitation and upgrading of existing ones. With regard to road transport, the following corridors have been put on the priority list for rehabilitation works: Tashkent-Almaty-Khorgos; Almaty-Akmola; and Aralsk-Actiubinsk-Uralsk. The programme also includes rehabilitation and upgrading of road networks across western Kazakhstan in connection with mineral exploration and development projects. Finally, the programme includes a project to rebuild the port of Aktau on the Caspian Sea, for which an agreement for financing has been reached with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

45. In Kyrgyzstan, a project, financed in part by the European Union, to build an international railroad to link Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China via Kyrgyzstan is under way. However, the Government is giving increased support to road transport, which accounts for 80 per cent of the total volume of transport of persons and goods in the country. Priority is given to development of a road network to connect Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China. Part of that network is included in the ECO cooperation programme for the period 1998-2007.

46. In Tajikistan, a project to link Tajikistan and China by road was initiated in March 2000 with a loan from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). In addition, the Government has carried out feasibility studies for projects to rehabilitate and upgrade existing roads. The Government has reached agreements with donors, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and IDB, for the financing of some

of those projects. Rehabilitation works have already begun on the Bishkek-Osh road with a credit from the above-mentioned donors.

2. In the transit neighbours

47. Infrastructure-building, rehabilitation and upgrading works are ongoing in the major transit neighbours of the Central Asian landlocked States. In Turkey, where 10 major ports already meet current domestic and transit needs, a project is under way to build a new port of a capacity of 700,000 Twenty-feet Equivalent Units (TEU) on the Marmara coast and a container terminal of a capacity of 1 million TEU at Derince. Turkey is also participating in a Turkish-Georgian railway project to connect Turkey to TRACECA routes in the Black Sea region.

48. The Islamic Republic of Iran is undertaking programmes to increase the handling capacity and the efficiency of its ports and to intensify its transport infrastructure networks. Such programmes include the building of the Bafq-Mashhad railroad with a view to reducing the length of the Mashhad-Bandar e Abbas corridor by 820 kilometres.

49. From a geopolitical perspective, the most important development in the region is the gradual return of stability in Afghanistan, which is well appreciated by the regional transit business community. But the country's transport infrastructure, which has been damaged by decades of civil strife, needs to be rehabilitated. The resumption of cooperation with donors is proving helpful in that regard. New agreements with donors include the $108 million loan the World Bank has recently approved to help Afghanistan improve its transport infrastructure.

3. The donor community

50. The donor community is involved in transport infrastructure development in the Central Asian region through direct assistance to the landlocked States and their transit neighbours and through such regional programmes as TRACECA. Active donors include the World Bank, ADB, EBRD, IDB and the United Nations system. Donor assistance has played a decisive role in the development of the east-west and north-south corridors. Many of the donor-supported projects regarding those networks, which started in the late 1990s, are still under way.

B. Measures to overcome non-physical bottlenecks

51. Measures to overcome non-physical bottlenecks include essentially: (i) progress towards implementation of international conventions, regional cooperation agreements and national regulations; and (ii) cooperation projects of the donor community.

1. International conventions, regional, multilateral and bilateral agreements and national regulations

(a) International conventions

52. The newly independent States of Central Asia have been encouraged to accede to international conventions on transport. In particular, in its resolution 48/11 of 23 April 1992 on "Road and rail transport modes in relation to facilitation measures",

ESCAP recommended that all its member States accede to the seven conventions listed in table 4 below. As is shown in the table, the landlocked States and their transit neighbours have made progress with respect to accession to some of those conventions. However, the number of conventions ratified is still modest and the implementation process is slow.

Table 4
Status of accession of countries of the region to international conventions on road transport listed in ESCAP resolution 48/11, as of October 2002

Country	*Convention on Road Traffic (1968)*	*Convention on Road Signs and Signals (1968)*	*Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (1975)*	*Customs Convention on the Temporary Importation of Commercial Road Vehicles (1956)*	*Customs Convention on Containers (1972)*	*International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Control of Goods (1982)*	*Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) (1956)*
Afghanistan			X	X			
Armenia			R			R	
Azerbaijan	R		R	R		R	
China					X		
Georgia	R	R	R		R	R	R
Islamic Republic of Iran	X	X	X				R
Kazakhstan	R	R	R				R
Kyrgyzstan			R	R		R	R
Pakistan	X	X					
Russia	X	X	X		X	X	X
Tajikistan	R	R	R				R
Turkey			X		X		R
Turkmenistan	R	R	R				R
Uzbekistan	R	R	R	R	R	R	R

Legend: X = acceded; R = acceded after adoption of ESCAP resolution 48/11.
Source: Martin Lentsch and Hirohoto Toda. *Transit Transport issues of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries: The Case Study of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan*, ESCAP, 2003.

(b) Subregional cooperation agreements

53. The Central Asian landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours have committed themselves to several regional cooperation agreements, often within the framework of regional integration arrangements, such as ECO, or regional development programmes, such as TRACECA and SPECA. The agreements relate essentially to harmonization of legal and customs documents and border-crossing procedures.

54. As to harmonization of border-crossing procedures, some progress is being made with the assistance of ECO and ADB and through TRACECA, notably on the Almaty-Bishkek road. But the progress is very slow and needs greater political commitment and further groundwork. TRACECA and ECO are doing groundwork for the introduction of joint customs facilities to streamline customs control

procedures by eliminating double inspections and to establish some atmosphere of trust between customs officers from each side of the relevant borders.

55. An ECO inter-ministerial committee is being set up to help simplify border-crossing procedures and promote international transport. In that regard, an international passenger traffic line was opened in 2001 and will soon be operational between Almaty, Tashkent, Turkmenabad, Tehran and Istanbul. Member countries of ECO have also signed a protocol to launch a demonstration bloc container train along the Almaty-Tehran segment of the Trans-Asian Railway. In addition, efforts are being made to harmonize transport fares and rates on the Druzhba-Almaty-Tashkent-Turkmenabad-Tehran-Istanbul-Kapikule rail corridor.

56. Progress towards the development of a common ECO insurance scheme for passengers, vehicles and cargo is slow. In Kyrgyzstan, however, the Government has recently been considering joining the Green Card system that is applied in Europe.

(c) Bilateral agreements

57. Bilateral agreements are signed not only between countries having common borders, but also between countries that are linked by any transit trade relation. Notably, those agreements include conditions on distribution of permits to national transport operators, and entry and transit conditions. Kazakhstan, for example, has signed more than 40 bilateral agreements with countries of the region and countries as far as the Netherlands. In 2002, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation signed a bilateral agreement of a particular nature. It was an agreement on the delimitation of the northern sections of the Caspian Sea bed with the objective of allowing the two countries to establish sovereignty rights over the water body for the development of energy resources. Such an agreement has implications for navigation on the Caspian Sea and for trans-Caspian pipeline projects.

(d) National regulations

58. The central Asian landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours are introducing various national laws to regulate transit transport in their territories, taking into account international agreements and conventions. For example, Kazakhstan introduced a new law in January 2002 that has modified existing regulations on transport. It regulates entry, exit and transit for foreign trucks and public transport vehicles. Similarly, a new law stemming from decrees issued from 1999 to 2002 has been introduced in Uzbekistan to regulate entry and transit fees for vehicles from foreign countries.

2. Technical assistance and advisory services

(a) Technical assistance

59. The United Nations system provides the basic framework for regional cooperation. During the past few years, United Nations cooperation with the Central Asian countries has focused on infrastructure and institutional development. With regard to infrastructure development, ECE has been working on the extension of the "E" transport infrastructure networks to the Caucasus and Central Asia. The extension of the "E" road network was completed since the amendments to annex 1 to the European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries entered into force in December 2001. A new map showing the network's extension was circulated in

2002. Work continues on the standards and parameters to which those roads should conform and on road signalling issues. The extension of the "E" rail network was also completed in January 2002. Similarly, ESCAP is currently coordinating efforts to draft an intergovernmental agreement on the Asian Highway network.

60. In the area of institutional development, SPECA has established a working group, the Regional Advisory Committee, with the objectives of: (i) helping simplify custom documents and develop simpler border-crossing procedures; and (ii) facilitating accession to international conventions. The UNDP and ESCAP-initiated Silk Route Area Programme also continues, with activities aiming at facilitating border-crossing.

(b) Advisory services

61. The donor community also provides advisory services in the form of studies, conferences and workshops. UNCTAD is currently helping ECO carry out a study on the promotion of multi-modal transport in the region in collaboration with ESCAP and IDB. The United Nations system also organizes expert meetings on landlocked and transit developing countries. The system is in the process of convening the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation, in Almaty, in August 2003.

V. New actions needed to complement the measures under way to improve the transit environment

62. **The most important factors that undermine the transit environment in the newly independent States in Central Asia include inadequate capacity, impediments to trade and transport and inadequate regional cooperation. While the first factor can be linked to the difficult economic situation the countries are experiencing, the second and third factors can be remedied by increased political will.**

A. Capacity improvement

63. **The Governments should be encouraged to continue and intensify efforts to build, rehabilitate or upgrade the transit infrastructure. Particular emphasis should be put on development of trans-Caspian routes.**

64. **As to road transport, border facilities should be improved and better equipped. Use of joint border facilities should be encouraged. Similarly, use of information technology at the border control points will facilitate the flow of information and reduce waiting time. That effort requires that border facilities be equipped with computers capable of running information management systems such as the UNCTAD Automated System of Customs Data Management. Customs officers need more training not only to deal with the new transit transport issues, but also to run the relevant information management systems. ASYCUDA has been proposed to the countries of the region, but has been little used so far. UNCTAD can conduct studies to assess**

the situation. On the basis of the results of such studies, UNCTAD can provide, possibly in cooperation with UNDP and other donors, training and technical assistance on the information management systems to be installed.

65. Rail transport is losing its competitive edge to road transport in part because of deteriorating infrastructure, old rolling stock and poor bogie change facilities. All those issues should be addressed. However, priority should be given to improving bogie change facilities.

B. Removal of impediments to international trade

66. Barriers to transit transport are an obstacle to international trade and should be dealt with vigorously. Some countries in the region have acceded to WTO, which favours trade liberalization and removal of barriers to trade. However, progress is slow. Various types of barriers impede the expansion of regional trade. National laws that restrict the flow of transit trade are a major barrier to trade. The same is true of bilateral agreements that restrict competition at the regional level, such as the ones relating to distribution of permit quotas to national transport operators. Likewise, poor logistic organization, inadequate information and prevalence of illicit practices such as rent-seeking and corruption contribute to higher costs. Nonetheless, part of such costs can be reduced by trade facilitation and trade liberalization. In that regard, technical assistance on trade facilitation from UNCTAD and other donors would be helpful.

C. Strengthening regional cooperation in Central Asia

67. The newly independent States of Central Asia have acceded to a relatively large number of intergovernmental organizations of various sizes aiming at various levels and scopes of integration. However, the actual level of cooperation between the countries of the region is not adequate. It is even apparent that the level of cooperation is not always as good among the landlocked States as between the latter and their transit neighbours.

68. Progress in regional integration can only benefit the transit environment. Such issues as, inter alia, border-crossing procedures and the harmonization of transit documents, can find easier solutions if protocols and agreements pertaining to broadly defined regional integration programmes are implemented. The higher the level of regional integration, the weaker the effect of being landlocked. While Austria, Luxembourg and Switzerland are also landlocked countries, they have achieved a high level of external trade performance and prosperity largely owing to the high level of regional integration and cooperation in Europe.

69. The Central Asian landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours should be encouraged to make greater efforts towards regional integration so as to facilitate implementation of regional agreements. However, given the relative plethora of intergovernmental organizations in the region, there is confusion as to the role of each organization in the integration process. Efforts to coordinate the actions of the various intergovernmental organizations should continue. Moreover, UNCTAD, UNDP and other donors,

such as ADB and the European Union, in association with relevant regional integration arrangements, notably CIS and ECO, can set up a technical assistance programme to help promote effective integration in Central Asia.

D. Need for a strong private sector

70. **The private sector is generally weak in the CIS countries where the Governments continue to play a dominant role in the transport sector. Railways, airways, waterways and inland ports in all five Central Asian landlocked developing countries are State-operated. The private sector is active in the road transport sector, which, however, is dominated by foreign (predominantly Russian and Azerbaijani) companies and operators. The private sector can play a greater role not only in freight operation, but also in the provision of support services relating to the railways, airways and inland water transport subsectors.**

71. **A strong private sector is a good indicator of a healthy business environment. It gives domestic and foreign capital owners incentive and confidence to invest in the economy. Since foreign investors sometimes prefer joint ventures with domestic operators, the level and performance of domestic private investment are conditions for foreign direct investment flows.**

72. **The private sector is making some progress in the Central Asian landlocked developing countries. In Kazakhstan, private insurance companies are emerging. In addition, legislation has been introduced recently to allow private operation of rail freight. Private forwarding companies are also being established in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Those trends and other related efforts should be encouraged. Professional bodies or associations, such as national road trucker associations, should be promoted to give the private sector the capacity to negotiate efficiently with Governments and other institutions. The existence of civil associations will also facilitate the flow of information and help deter some illegal practices. To have a greater impact region-wide, national associations should not function in isolation, but should rather form regional networks capable of defending the interests of the private sector. The donor community can help promote and empower the private sector, notably through actions involving non-governmental organizations and civil society.**

Notes

[1] The World Bank has classified Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan among severely indebted countries and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan among moderately indebted countries.

[2] Martin Lentsch and Hirohoto Toda. *Transit Transport Issues of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries: The Case Study of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan*, ESCAP, 2003, p. 10.

[3] TRACECA is supported by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

[4] SPECA includes five the Central Asian landlocked developing countries and Azerbaijan.

[5] Eva Molnar and Lauri Ojada. *Transport and Trade Facilitation Issues in the CIS 7, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan*, World Bank, 2003, p. 9.

[6] Ibid.

United Nations A/58/210

General Assembly

Distr.: General
1 August 2003

Original: English

Fifty-eighth session
Item 97 of the provisional agenda*
Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Activities undertaken in implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 57/253, on the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The report provides an overview of initial follow-up actions taken by Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and major groups, as well as recent decisions by relevant intergovernmental bodies. The report also reviews activities and proposals by various stakeholders aimed at meeting the goals and targets adopted at the World Summit.

The report shows that there is a good deal of enthusiasm and dynamism involved in the follow-up to the World Summit and consensus on the sharper focus on implementation. An important thrust of implementation has been to identify obstacles and constraints in implementation and to share lessons learned and best practices at all levels. The widely varied actions and partnership initiatives being implemented at the national, regional and international levels demonstrate the imperative of strengthened cooperation and coordination within and between organizations of the United Nations system and other international institutions. The Commission on Sustainable Development, as the high-level intergovernmental body on sustainable development within the United Nations system, provides an important forum for sharing experiences in implementation gained at the country, regional and global levels and for integrating such experiences with policy review and guidance.

* A/58/150.

03-45188 (E) 080903

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I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 57/253 of 20 December 2002, on the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg Summit), endorsed the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The Assembly decided, inter alia, to adopt sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities, in particular for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration. In the same resolution the Assembly urged Governments and organizations of the United Nations system, as well as other intergovernmental organizations and major groups, to take timely actions to ensure effective follow-up to the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit. The Assembly also encouraged the implementation of voluntary partnership initiatives and called for further discussion of this matter within the Commission on Sustainable Development.

2. The present report is prepared pursuant to resolution 57/253 to provide an overview of initial follow-up actions taken by Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and major groups, as well as recent decisions by relevant intergovernmental bodies. The report also reviews activities and proposals by various stakeholders aimed at meeting the goals and targets adopted at the Johannesburg Summit.

3. To avoid duplication, the report will leave out information on activities that will be considered by the General Assembly under other items, such as those related to the oceans and small island developing States. Separate reports under these items will be submitted to the Assembly.

II. Follow-up actions taken at the intergovernmental level

4. When the Johannesburg Summit closed on 4 September 2002, it was the prevailing sentiment that the conclusion of the Summit represented the beginning of a common journey rather than the end of an intergovernmental event. Building upon the World Trade Organization's Ministerial Conference (fourth session, Doha, November 2001) and the International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, March 2002), the Johannesburg Summit launched a Plan of Implementation with specific goals and time-bound targets. There were high expectations of concrete progress and calls for a sharper focus on implementation. This emphasis on implementation has since been endorsed by Governments, international institutions, major groups and other stakeholders, setting in motion a process of reorientation of programmes and activities. The follow-up action at the intergovernmental level in the United Nations has been swift and focused, as exemplified by the General Assembly in endorsing the outcomes of the Summit. Highlighted below, in chronological order, are some of the major decisions taken at the intergovernmental level that have an immediate impact on the implementation of the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit.

A. Outcomes of the eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

5. Meeting for the first time since the Johannesburg Summit, the Commission on Sustainable Development dedicated its eleventh session (28 April-9 May 2003) to the elaboration of its future programme, organization and methods of work. In keeping with the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, which provides that the Commission should place more emphasis on actions that enable implementation at all levels, the Commission agreed to organize its future work as a series of two-year action-oriented implementation cycles, which will include, in the first year of each cycle, a review session and, in the second, a policy session.[1]

6. The Commission further decided that its first review session, scheduled for April 2004, would undertake an evaluation of progress in implementing Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The policy session, to be held in May 2005, will build upon the outcome of the review session and will take policy decisions on practical measures and options to expedite implementation. Prior to the policy session, an intergovernmental preparatory meeting will be convened in February/March 2005 to address constraints and obstacles in the process of implementation.

7. For the 2004-2005 cycle, the Commission decided to focus on the themes of water, sanitation and human settlements, while also giving priority attention to linkages with cross-cutting issues, including poverty eradication, changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development. The multi-year programme of work of the Commission is annexed to the present report.

8. The Commission also took several other steps that promise to have far-reaching implications for implementation. Among other actions, it decided to invite the regional commissions to consider organizing regional implementation meetings so that regional dimensions could feed into the global review more effectively. The Commission invited the General Assembly to consider using the resources previously devoted to its former ad hoc intersessional working groups to support the participation of representatives of member States of the Commission in one of their respective regional meetings in the implementation cycle.

9. To further enhance the contributions of major groups to its work, the Commission also decided to have greater involvement of major groups in its activities, including through their participation in an interactive dialogue during the high-level segments.

10. In accordance with resolution 57/253, the Commission had further discussions at its eleventh session on partnerships for sustainable development. Building on the work and knowledge gained in the preparatory processes for the Johannesburg Summit, the Commission agreed on a set of criteria and guidelines for partnerships associated with the follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit. The Commission reiterated that partnerships, as voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives, should contribute to the implementation of intergovernmental commitments; they are a complement to, not a substitute for, those commitments. The Commission also called for activities aimed at strengthening partnerships and facilitating new ones, including through initiatives such as partnership fairs and learning centres.

B. Integrated and coordinated conference follow-up

11. The matter of coordinated implementation of the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit was also addressed by the Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields. The Working Group commenced its work in January 2003 and subsequently submitted its recommendations to the General Assembly, which adopted them in resolution 57/270 B of 23 June 2003. In the section on the role of the Economic and Social Council, including that of the functional commissions, the Assembly reiterated that the Council should continue to strengthen its role as the central mechanism for system-wide coordination and decided that it should review, by means of a cross-sectoral approach, the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits and their follow-up processes.

12. In this context, the Assembly requested the Council to establish, no later than 2004, a multi-year work programme for the coordination segment of its substantive session, based on a focused and balanced list of cross-sectoral thematic issues common to the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits. The Assembly also invited the functional commissions to contribute, from their specific perspectives, to the assessment by the Council of the cross-sectoral thematic issue selected for the coordination segment of its substantive session. The Assembly further requested each functional commission to examine its methods of work in order to better pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, bearing in mind the progress recently achieved in this regard by certain commissions, especially the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Assembly underscored that the functional commissions, when mandated, should continue to have the primary responsibility for the review and assessment of progress made in implementing the outcomes of the United Nations conferences, while taking on a new focus in their methods of work.

C. Decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council at its 2003 substantive session

13. Complementing the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the General Assembly on the integrated and coordinated conference follow-up, the Economic and Social Council devoted its 2003 coordination segment to the topic "The role of the Economic and Social Council in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits". In response to General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, the Council welcomed the request of the Assembly for a multi-year programme of work for its coordination segment and expressed its determination to finalize the list of cross-sectoral thematic issues and the multi-year work programme, with the aim of reaching a decision before its substantive session in 2004.

14. At its 2003 substantive session, the Council also took action on the World Solidarity Fund. At the Johannesburg Summit, world leaders called for the establishment of a solidarity fund to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development. In response, the General Assembly adopted resolution 57/265 of 20 December 2002, requesting the Secretary-General to mandate the Administrator of

the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to take the necessary measures for the immediate operationalization of the World Solidarity Fund. In his report to the Assembly and to the Council,[2] the Administrator reported that the Fund had been set up and that steps were being taken to operationalize and publicize it. Recognizing the important potential contribution of the Fund to the achievement of development goals, the Council encouraged Member States, international organizations, the private sector, relevant institutions, foundations and individuals to contribute to it. The Council also requested that the Administrator of UNDP take further measures to operationalize the Fund and invited developing countries to identify indicative projects to be submitted for financing as soon as resources were made available to the Fund.

III. Actions taken by organizations of the United Nations system

15. In endorsing the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit, the General Assembly decided to adopt sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities, in particular for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration. This decision was reaffirmed in June 2003, when the Assembly adopted resolution 57/270 B, on integrated and coordinated conference follow-up. Organizations of the United Nations system have since been stepping up efforts to ensure that the sharper focus on implementation is integrated with their future programme activities.

16. The Secretary-General, for example, in his proposed programme budget for the period 2004-2005, has sought to align the activities of the United Nations with the priorities identified by the General Assembly. One such key priority has been the promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences, including the Johannesburg Summit. The implementation thrust was highlighted in the proposed programme budgets for the 2004-2005 biennium for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the regional commissions, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and other relevant entities.

17. This overall programme prioritization has been echoed in day-to-day work throughout the United Nations system. For instance, the five regional commissions, which were actively engaged in the preparatory processes of the Johannesburg Summit, are integrating the outcomes of the Summit with their ongoing work, reorienting relevant programme activities towards focused implementation. At its fifty-eighth session, in March 2003, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) considered its follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit and agreed that it should mainstream the three dimensions of sustainable development into all its areas of work. ECE also stressed that it should play an active role in the implementation of sustainable development strategies, in reviewing national sustainable development programmes and partnership initiatives and in creating new partnerships.[3]

18. The Committee on Environment and Natural Resources Development of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), at its fourth session, in December 2002, considered selected issues relating to regional follow-up

to the Johannesburg Summit. The Committee recommended to the fifty-ninth session of ESCAP that a senior-level policy forum be convened to discuss the follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit at the regional level in a holistic and comprehensive manner. It recommended that the ESCAP regional follow-up include efforts aimed at promoting regional and subregional cooperation, supporting the development of networks for information exchange and the sharing of policies and experiences, mobilizing resources and disseminating best practices.

19. In addition to efforts by ESCAP and ECE, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in response to the invitation of the Commission on Sustainable Development to hold regional implementation meetings and its decision on the themes of its 2004 review session, are taking steps to incorporate the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit into their intergovernmental and expert group meetings, including upcoming meetings on water, sanitation, human settlements and globalization.

20. At its twenty-second session, held in Nairobi in February 2003, the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum also considered the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit. The Governing Council welcomed the emphasis of the Summit on implementation and called for full and concrete commitment to implementing the outcomes of the Summit. It further agreed that Governments had resolved in Johannesburg to manage the impact of globalization rather than resist it, and that UNEP would have an important role to play in helping countries to develop policies and legislation to deal with environmental impacts associated with globalization.

21. The Rio Conventions — on biological diversity, desertification and climate change — also considered the issue of follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit. In Montreal in March 2003, the Convention on Biological Diversity held its open-ended intersessional meeting on the multi-year programme of work of the Conference of the Parties up to 2010. That meeting made a series of recommendations to be forwarded to the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties, scheduled for April 2004 in Malaysia. In recommendation 1 B, on the contribution of the Convention on Biological Diversity to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and to the Commission on Sustainable Development process, the meeting recognized the importance of close cooperation with the Commission on Sustainable Development to ensure mutual supportiveness within their respective work programmes so that the work of the Convention would contribute fully to the efforts of the international community to achieve sustainable development and poverty eradication. On the follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit, the meeting recommended a number of specific actions, which will be pursued within the framework of the Strategic Plan of the Convention and the Multi-Year Programme of Work of the Conference of the Parties up to 2010.

22. The forthcoming sixth session of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention to Combat Desertification (Havana, 25 August-5 September 2003) will consider the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit. The secretariat of the Convention, in a note to be submitted to the Conference of the Parties,[4] proposed that the Conference express appreciation for the Johannesburg Summit's recommendation that the Global Environment Facility become a financial mechanism of the Convention. The note also proposed that the Conference

emphasize the primary importance of supporting sustainable development in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas in implementing the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit.

23. Meeting shortly after the Johannesburg Summit, Ministers at the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (New Delhi, October 2002) adopted the Delhi Ministerial Declaration on Climate Change and Sustainable Development. The Declaration called for fuller integration of climate change objectives in national sustainable development strategies in key areas such as energy, health and water, etc., building on the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit.

24. UN-Habitat has taken a proactive approach to the follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit. One week after the conclusion of the Summit, the UN-Habitat secretariat reported the outcomes to the UN-Habitat Committee of Permanent Representatives. It has also used the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation as a guide to update its work under the Millennium Development Goals, such as its work on target 10, on water and sanitation. Within UN-Habitat, a Water, Sanitation and Infrastructure Branch has been set up to focus on the challenge of meeting the water and sanitation targets agreed in Johannesburg. Furthermore, UN-Habitat has been developing new initiatives for the Coalition for Sustainable Urbanization, bringing in new partners and adding new components.[5]

25. The United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have been contributing to the United Nations system-wide follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit through the United Nations Development Group and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. Part of the UNFPA focus is to mainstream the sanitation target of the Johannesburg Summit into country-level reporting. In addition, UNFPA has launched internal processes on the linkages among water, population, gender, reproductive health and poverty, as well as in other thematic areas, in order to strengthen UNFPA programme support for sustainable development at the country level.[5]

26. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in a report submitted to the one hundred and twenty-third session of the FAO Council (Rome, 28 October-2 November 2002), provided a detailed analysis of the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit and identified specific areas where FAO will implement programmes that will contribute directly to meeting the goals and targets set in Johannesburg. Among other initiatives, FAO will continue to assist Governments in the formulation and implementation of national and regional strategies, investment programmes and action plans in partnership with other United Nations agencies, scientific institutions and networks. Such assistance will address issues of land degradation, rural poverty, mountains, deforestation, biological diversity, fisheries, freshwater and toxic chemicals.

27. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the World Health Organization, UNCTAD and many other United Nations entities have joined forces with Governments and major groups to launch voluntary partnership initiatives in support of sustainable development. Of the partnerships announced so far in the context of the Johannesburg Summit and its follow-up (see section VII below), organizations of the United Nations system were involved as leading partners in about a quarter of them. Commitments by organizations of the United Nations to

implementation and their recent initiatives in programme reorientation suggest that their engagement in partnerships for sustainable development will continue to be strengthened.

28. At its meeting held in May 2003, the Council of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) included on its agenda an item on the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit and an item on the results of the eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Council requested that the GEF action plan be revised to consider, inter alia, the concept of partnership endorsed in Johannesburg, and that criteria and conditions be proposed for GEF to contribute to partnerships aimed at achieving global environmental benefits. The Council further requested its secretariat to prepare, for the Council meeting in November 2003, a note on how GEF might respond to the invitation of the Commission to participate in its work in follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit.

IV. Coordination of implementation activities

29. The sharper focus on implementation and the wide-ranging activities of organizations of the United Nations system underscore the imperative of coordination and collaboration within and between the United Nations system and relevant international institutions. The United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) agreed that the Johannesburg Summit had given renewed political impetus to the implementation of commitments and agreements reached in Rio in 1992 and had introduced new goals and targets to guide and orient follow-up at both the national and the international level. Members of CEB pointed out that the key message to be conveyed by the United Nations system should be "implementation", which implies acting on the whole range of commitments. They further emphasized that the United Nations system, in contributing to the implementation of the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit, based on a clear division of responsibilities, should focus on promoting policies that effectively integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, as well as on supporting the achievement of specific goals and time-bound targets.[7]

30. At its eleventh session, the Commission on Sustainable Development invited the United Nations agencies, programmes and funds, GEF and international and regional financial and trade institutions to participate actively in the work of the Commission. The Commission requested the Secretary-General to further promote system-wide inter-agency cooperation and coordination and to include in the present report proposals outlining an integrated and comprehensive response of the United Nations system to sustainable development.

31. CEB has been addressing the matter of United Nations system-wide follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit and has requested its High-level Committee on Programmes to pursue the actions required to maximize the United Nations system's support for a sustained follow-up and to give further focus to the matter in 2003. The request from the Commission on Sustainable Development to the Secretary-General for proposals outlining an integrated and comprehensive response of the United Nations system to sustainable development will be considered by the High-level Committee on Programmes in its ongoing consultations.

32. As the high-level intergovernmental body on sustainable development within the United Nations system, the Commission on Sustainable Development continues to serve as a forum for consideration of issues relating to the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development. As such, the Commission provides a unique forum for addressing new challenges and opportunities and for sharing lessons learned and best practices, including those gained by the United Nations system in the process of implementation at the country level. The Commission, through its review and policy sessions, can thus act as a focal point where the implementation track and the policy review track meet and where cross-fertilization of ideas can take place.

V. International initiatives and events

33. Since the Johannesburg Summit, Governments, United Nations agencies, major groups and other stakeholders have launched a growing number of initiatives and events in follow-up to the Summit. The rich and diverse calendar of national, regional and international meetings and events provides ample evidence of the dynamism, energy and commitment of stakeholders to sustainable development.[8] Highlighted below are but a few of the events.

34. The International Expert Meeting on the 10-Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production was held in Marrakech from 16 to 19 June 2003. The meeting was organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in cooperation with UNEP. Financial support for the meeting, particularly for the participation of experts from developing countries, was provided by the Governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden. Some 115 participants from 59 countries attended the meeting, including representatives of government agencies, international organizations, consumer organizations, business and industry.

35. The meeting received reports from two regional expert meetings on sustainable consumption and production, held in Buenos Aires on 22 and 23 April 2003, and in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from 21 to 23 May 2003. The international and regional meetings were organized in response to the call in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation for the development of a 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, and focused on ways to broaden and strengthen international cooperation on the issue.

36. The Marrakech meeting agreed on the Marrakech Process on sustainable consumption and production, stressing that the challenge is to move from the more generic to the specific and focus on implementation. A number of follow-up actions were identified as part of the ongoing Marrakech Process, including targeted responses by international organizations to address Governments' priorities and the establishment of mechanisms that encourage and support information and experience-sharing, network-building, and dissemination of best practices. The Marrakech Process also underscored the involvement of all stakeholders, the establishment of concrete partnerships and the strengthening of regional efforts.[9] The Process is to be continued through regional meetings, task forces and round tables, with another broad expert meeting in two years' time.

37. In response to the call of the eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development for activities aimed at strengthening partnerships in the

context of the Johannesburg Summit process and its follow-up, the Government of Italy will host an International Forum on Partnerships for Sustainable Development in March 2004 in Rome. The purpose of the Forum is to enhance the contributions of partnerships for sustainable development, including in the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and other agreements relating to sustainable development. The outcomes of the Forum will be presented during the twelfth session of the Commission, at its first review session, scheduled for April 2004.

38. UN-Habitat, in collaboration with the Chinese Ministry of Construction and the city of Weihai, will convene the Weihai Conference on Sustainable Urbanization Strategies in September 2003. This event is being organized as a follow-up action to the Johannesburg Summit and will support international exchange of experiences on sustainable urbanization strategies, including the implementation of the Water for Asian Cities Programme, a strategic partnership programme in support of the implementation of the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

VI. Major groups

39. The important contributions by the nine major groups[10] and other stakeholders to the ongoing work on sustainable development issues have become increasingly evident, as seen by their active participation in the Johannesburg Summit preparatory processes and the Summit itself. Major groups can play multiple roles in implementing the outcomes of the Summit by mobilizing efforts in the areas of education, information and awareness-raising; monitoring progress towards the implementation of sustainable development; and contributing directly to implementation through their participation in partnership initiatives.

40. Recognizing the important contributions of major groups, the Commission on Sustainable Development decided at its eleventh session to strengthen major-group involvement in the activities of the Commission, including through the participation of their representatives in the interactive dialogue during high-level segments. The Commission also decided to enhance contributions to the Commission from major groups by making multi-stakeholder dialogues more action- and implementation-oriented and by striving for a better balance and better representation of major groups from all regions. Active involvement of major groups in partnership-related and capacity-building activities at all levels, including the partnership fairs and learning centres, was also emphasized by the Commission.

VII. Partnerships

41. Voluntary partnerships aimed at implementing sustainable development have proved to be an important complementary outcome of the Johannesburg Summit. More than 200 such partnerships were launched during the Summit process, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation designated the Commission on Sustainable Development as the focal point for discussion of partnerships to promote sustainable development.

42. At its eleventh session, the Commission on Sustainable Development reaffirmed that voluntary, multi-stakeholder partnerships contribute to the

implementation of intergovernmental commitments in Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, recognizing that partnerships are a complement to, not a substitute for, those commitments.

43. The Commission decided that partnerships within the context of the Johannesburg Summit process and its follow-up should be developed and implemented in accordance with an agreed set of criteria and guidelines, also taking note of the Bali guiding principles, which were developed at the final meeting of the preparatory committee for the Johannesburg Summit, and General Assembly resolution 56/76 of 11 December 2001.

44. To date, about 230 partnerships and 35 activities or processes to initiate partnerships have been posted on the Commission on Sustainable Development web site. Nearly two thirds of these are of global scope; the remaining third have a regional or subregional focus. Overall, Africa, Asia and small island developing States are the regions and group of countries with the highest number of partnerships, followed by Latin America, with few in Eastern and Central Europe.[11]

45. Nearly two thirds of the partnerships have funding, either to carry out initial phases or for the entire period of the partnership. On the basis of the information provided by leading partners to date, some $252 million has been committed for partnerships and activities and processes to initiate partnerships. An additional $120 million is currently being sought or negotiated with potential donors. Just over a third of the partnerships have Governments as leading partners. Organizations of the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations are involved as leading partners in 4 out of 10 partnership initiatives.

46. Partnerships launched by major groups accounted for a quarter of the total. Non-governmental organizations, science and research centres, local authorities and universities have initiated the majority of partnerships led by major groups. Private sector partners are involved in many of the partnerships, though not usually as leading partners.

47. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is currently working on a database to manage information related to partnerships registered with the Commission on Sustainable Development. Once operational, the database will have a web interface, which will enable easy access to the information.

48. In accordance with the multi-year programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, it is anticipated that those partnerships related to the themes being considered in each two-year work cycle will receive particular attention at the corresponding session of the Commission, particularly in relation to lessons learned, case studies, constraints and opportunities. Hence, partnerships that relate to water, sanitation and human settlements are expected to be a focus at the Commission's review session in April 2004.

49. The Commission on Sustainable Development has also called for activities aimed at strengthening partnerships and facilitating new ones. At the 2004 review session, building on experience from innovative activities arranged for the Commission at its eleventh session, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs will organize a partnership fair and specific learning centre activities relating to partnerships.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

50. The present report provides an overview of initial follow-up actions taken by Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and major groups, as well as decisions adopted recently by relevant intergovernmental bodies. The report shows that there is great enthusiasm and dynamism involved in the follow-up to the Johannesburg Summit and consensus on the sharper focus on implementation. An important thrust of implementation has been to identify obstacles and constraints in implementation and to share lessons learned and best practices at all levels. The widely varied actions and partnership initiatives being implemented at the national, regional and international levels demonstrate the imperative of strengthened cooperation and coordination within and between organizations of the United Nations system and other international institutions. The Commission on Sustainable Development, as the high-level intergovernmental body on sustainable development within the United Nations system, provides an important forum for reviewing progress in implementation, for sharing experiences and lessons learned in implementation at the country, regional and global levels and for integrating such experiences and lessons with policy review and guidance.

51. On the basis of the information provided in the present report, it is recommended that the General Assembly:

(a) Approve the use of the resources previously devoted to the former ad hoc intersessional working groups of the Commission on Sustainable Development to support the participation of representatives of States members of the Commission in one of their respective regional meetings in each implementation cycle;

(b) Urge Governments to continue to be actively engaged in the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation;

(c) Call on Governments to provide strong support to the Commission on Sustainable Development in its two-year action-oriented implementation cycle, consisting of a review session and a policy session, and, in this regard, invite Governments to launch, support and engage in initiatives, events and other activities in preparation for the review and policy sessions;

(d) Request the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to continue promoting system-wide inter-agency cooperation and coordination in implementing Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Notes

[1] See E/2003/29-E/CN.17/2003/6, Chap. I.A, draft resolution I, para. 2.

[2] A/58/72-E/2003/53, annex.

[3] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 17* (E/2003/37-E/ECE/1406), paras. 35-40.

[4] ICCD/COP (6)/5.

[5] See "UN-Habitat's Contribution to WSSD", http://www.unhabitat.org/wssd/followup.html.

[6] See E/2003/13, para.54.

[7] See E/2003/55, paras. 15-16.

[8] See http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/calendar/calendar.htm, http://www.unep.org/Calendar/and http://www.sdgateway.net/events/default.asp.

[9] More information on the meeting can be found at http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/.

[10] Women, children and youth, indigenous people, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community and farmers.

[11] For updates on partnership initiatives see http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/partnerships/partnerships.htm.

Annex

Multi-year programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development

Cycle	*Thematic cluster*	*Cross-cutting issues*
2004/2005	• Water • Sanitation • Human settlements	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2006/2007	• Energy for sustainable development • Industrial development • Air pollution/atmosphere • Climate change	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2008/2009	• Agriculture • Rural development • Land • Drought • Desertification • Africa	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2010/2011[a]	• Transport • Chemicals • Waste management • Mining • Ten-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2012/2013[a]	• Forests • Biodiversity • Biotechnology • Tourism • Mountains	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education

Cycle	*Thematic cluster*	*Cross-cutting issues*
2014/2015[a]	• Oceans and seas • Marine resources • Small island developing States • Disaster management and vulnerability	Poverty eradication; changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production; protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development; sustainable development in a globalizing world; health and sustainable development; sustainable development of small island developing States; sustainable development for Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality; and education
2016/2017	• Overall appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation	

[a] The thematic cluster will remain as part of the multi-year programme of work as scheduled, unless otherwise agreed by the Commission.

United Nations A/58/211

General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 August 2003

Original: English

Fifty-eighth session
Items 121 and 132 of the provisional agenda*

Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Review of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures

Note by the Secretary-General

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, 54/244 of 23 December 1999 and 56/253 of 24 December 2001, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit, for the attention of the General Assembly, the attached report, conveyed to him by the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, on the review of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures.

2. The Secretary-General takes note of the findings set out in the report and concurs with the recommendations for eliminating duplication and improving the efficiency of processes.

* A/58/150.

03-45208 (E) 050903

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the review of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in United Nations administrative processes and procedures

Summary

In its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, to review administrative tasks, procedures and policies with a view to eliminating duplication, and unnecessary and complex bureaucratic procedures and practices within all departments and entities of the Secretariat, and to ensure that the Organization is managed in an integrated manner in order to eliminate duplication.

The team focused on the processes in travel, procurement and the administration of staff entitlements and adopted a consultative approach that sought input from relevant staff across the Organization.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services found that the Secretariat's administrative environment is not fully leveraging the advantages of technology, nor is it applying modern process management practices adopted by other organizations. Many of the administrative processes are still manual, cumbersome, time-consuming, inefficient and costly to administer. In some cases, layers of control slow down the process without providing any real value.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services did note, however, that certain offices have addressed the issue through the development of new processes and that others were at various stages of initiating or planning some effort to change processes in their areas.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services established a steering group named the "Project Management Office", whose existence was limited to the duration of the present review. Relevant stakeholders in the Department of Management and executive officers were invited to participate. The purpose of the Project Management Office was to develop a business case that would form the basis of the recommendations in the present report and address any cross-cutting issues that might arise.

Based on observations, suggestions and ideas generated in the numerous discussions with staff (mainly from the Department of Management), the following recommendations were formulated:

1. Establish a project team with representation from all stakeholders for the purpose of commissioning a detailed requirements analysis for:

(a) Automation of the travel process to provide staff with an electronic travel request form interfaced with the Integrated Management Information System and an electronic travel claim form, which would use data available in the system;

(b) Identification of an organization-wide application for procurement, which would be used at headquarters, offices away from Headquarters and peacekeeping missions;

(c) Further automation of the processes for rental subsidy, education grant and dependency allowances to provide staff with access to their personal details and to electronic forms for applying for entitlements.

2. Streamline the travel process, exempting the claims procedure for travel that did not deviate from the authorized itinerary.

3. Implement an information security and data privacy policy, with administrative instructions making electronic authorizations acceptable for approval and certification.

4. Implement employee self-certification, with a mechanism for random check of supporting documentation for rental subsidy and dependency allowances.

5. Redefine the role of the executive office and the administrative officers in departments and offices.

6. Implement a central project registry for computerized systems.

During the review, some work commenced relating to the preceding recommendations. In the response to the draft report, the Department of Management provided an update of the status of two such initiatives, one being the development of an automated solution for staff members applying for dependency allowances (replacing the manual P.84 form) and the other being the establishment of a group to work on the automation of the education-grant entitlement process.

The Department of Management also launched a task force to review the delegation of authority in the Organization. The task force review will address the definition of the roles and responsibilities of the executive office, as recommended in the present report. The Department of Management also reported that the Information and Technology Services Division had completed the establishment of a central registry for systems (recommendation 6), which is now available on the United Nations Intranet.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/253 of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, to review administrative tasks, procedures and policies with a view to eliminating duplication, and unnecessary and complex bureaucratic procedures and practices within all departments and entities of the Secretariat, and to ensure that the Organization was managed in an integrated manner in order to eliminate duplication.

2. The comments of management were sought on the draft report and were taken into account in the preparation of the final report. Management comments are shown in italics.

II. Methodology

3. The Management Consulting Section of the Office of Internal Oversight Services adopted a consultative approach to the assignment, which was designed to include administrative staff from the outset. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recognized that the input and insight that could be gathered from the staff performing administrative duties on a day-to-day basis was essential to the project, as was the need to highlight issues and raise staff members' awareness of the opportunity for improving work methods.

4. The methodology included facilitated workshops for executive officers in the Secretariat as well as interviews and meetings with staff and management in the Department of Management, including the Accounts Division, the Travel and Transportation Service, the Procurement Division and the Office of Human Resources Management. E-mail was used extensively to collect data from staff in offices away from Headquarters.

5. The Office of Internal Oversight Services collected data from administrative offices at Headquarters and offices away from Headquarters on processes and procedures that they considered duplicative, bureaucratic and overly complex. The Office of Internal Oversight Services team also canvassed staff for suggestions on how processes or procedures could be changed, enhanced or eliminated to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

6. The Department of Management participated actively in discussions regarding their current and planned process improvement initiatives and in determining the impact of those initiatives and Office of Internal Oversight Services recommendations on the Organization.

III. Scope

7. The project focused exclusively on administrative processes. Substantive areas were excluded from the project scope since they were being addressed by other initiatives of the reform effort.

8. The Office of Internal Oversight Services approach to the General Assembly mandate for the review focused on those administrative areas, which, if streamlined, could result in enhanced organizational productivity. Processes in travel,

procurement and the administration of staff entitlements were selected since they entail high-volume administrative actions that could potentially have the greatest impact on the Organization's operations.

9. While the recommendations made are based on the observations in those three areas, they are relevant to most processes in the Organization that are still not fully automated or that require manual completion of forms. In addition, many of the recommendations suggest new or enhanced organizational policies that would be applicable to all processes.

IV. General observations

10. The review revealed that the administrative environment in the Secretariat did not fully leverage the advantages of technology or apply best practices adopted by other organizations. In fact, some administrative processes were still manual, cumbersome, time-consuming, inefficient and costly to administer. In some cases, layers of control slowed down the process without providing any real value.

11. The Office of Internal Oversight Services did note, however, that certain offices had already addressed the issue by developing new processes and that others were at various stages of initiating or planning some effort to improve their processes. For example, the Office of Human Resources Management had developed an automated recruitment and placement system known as Galaxy, which contained the design for a separate module to facilitate management of staff entitlements and give staff access to their personal records. The Accounts Division had been exploring options to improve the travel reimbursement process and the Procurement Division had been engaged in an ongoing exercise to reform the procurement of goods and services.

12. The present report offers recommendations for improvement related to two critical elements: firstly, the streamlining of processes through automated workflow; and secondly, the implementation of adequate policies to support an automated environment. As a result of the review, implementation of the recommendations would have a significant effect on the elimination of duplication and complexity and would reduce the cost of administering processes in the Organization.

V. Detailed observations

13. The detailed observations in the following paragraphs support the case for change. Notwithstanding the report's focus on the specific processes in travel, procurement and the administration of staff entitlements, the Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that the observations are applicable to other organizational processes that still require the manual completion of forms. The recommendations and associated benefits will, therefore, not be limited to the processes under review.

A. Manual and duplicative procedures

14. The implementation of the Integrated Management Information System has moved the Organization from primarily paper-based transaction processing to

processes that have been partially automated. Full automation however, will only be achieved when the entire workflow can be completed electronically. An inherent part of the current travel, procurement and staff entitlement processes is the manual completion of a form. While most forms that are commonly used in the Organization are now available electronically, they are not integrated into the Integrated Management Information System. Current procedures require that the data on those forms must still be captured in the Integrated Management Information System or on other computerized systems. In addition, procedures often require that the form be printed in order to obtain an authorizing signature.

15. The inefficient use of resources resulting from duplicated effort may be significant, considering the cumulative effect of all the administrative processes in the Organization that require forms to be completed and for which the same data is re-entered into a computerized system. The inefficiency could be even greater when the delays in processing and the errors resulting from inaccurate data entry are factored in.

16. "Upstream data collection" refers to the shift in the responsibility and accountability for accurate data entry to the source or initiator of the transaction. This practice ensures that data is entered directly into the appropriate system by the individual requesting the transaction, thereby reducing the requirement for paper forms, and eliminating the duplication of data entry and the resultant errors from inaccurate data input.

17. In an automated process a transaction is electronically routed through the system in a sequential manner that presents the transaction to the appropriate individual for action, in real time. This electronic workflow saves the time that is usually devoted to physically submitting paper forms for approval or certification to individuals who are often in different locations. Using the electronic workflow, the time required to complete a transaction is not dependent on the physical location or proximity to the approver or certifier.

18. The internal controls required for transactions must be maintained in the electronic workflow. Approval and certification procedures are a mandatory and inherent part of the workflow in administrative processes. In most cases, a physical signature is the only acceptable form of authorization. The requirement of a physical signature as authorization introduces a manual procedure that impedes efforts to fully automate a process. The recognition and acceptance of electronic authorizations is therefore a key element in the process. Organizational policies will need to be implemented to ensure that all the security and procedural elements are adequate to provide the same level of internal control and accountability offered by physical signature authorizations.

19. There is clearly a case for the use of automation to eliminate duplication and streamline processes. The case is further strengthened by instances in which the savings are more tangible. The Office of Internal Oversight Services calculated that pay statements for Secretariat staff were printed and distributed monthly by the Payroll Section at an estimated cost to the Organization of $88,000 per annum. During the preparation of the present report, the Integrated Management Information System Service and the Payroll Section developed and implemented a solution to distribute pay statements by e-mail, making it possible for staff members to access their monthly pay statements from any location that provides access to their United Nations e-mail account. This obviates the need to print and distribute the pay

statements and has the added advantage of providing staff access to their pay statements even when they are away from their offices.

20. An additional benefit of automation is that, unlike paper, copies do not get lost or misplaced when moving from office to office. An automated audit trail can track authorized transactions by individuals and would enable relevant staff to check the status of their transactions in real time. Information stays with the transaction at each step in the process and can therefore be used to populate new forms, representing significant time savings for administrative staff.

B. Complex bureaucratic procedures

21. Eliminating superfluous steps in a process is another way in which complexity can be reduced. The current travel process, for example, has twenty-nine steps from the initial request to the reconciliation of the entitlements and allowances. The process is complex and over-detailed, and it can result in the inconsistent application of travel rules and delay in the reimbursement of expenses.

22. In 2001, approximately 5,800 travel authorizations were issued by the Secretariat. The Office of Internal Oversight Services noted that in approximately 50 per cent of the transactions, the traveller did not deviate from the itinerary or change the period of travel authorized in the original travel request. Consequently, if the traveller had received tickets and cash advances to cover fully all expenses and subsistence, reconciliation would have resulted in a zero settlement. Currently, since travel advances are not paid in full and the procedure for travel claims is compulsory, the process results in a small settlement, usually for terminal expenses. Considering the effort expended by staff members, executive officers and the Accounts Division in the travel process, as well as the complaints regarding delays in settlement of claims, significant benefit could be derived from improvement. Settlement delays can be attributed to the volume of claims presented to the six General Service staff of the Accounts Division's Travel and Vendor Claims Unit, who analyse and recalculate each claim to determine the correct amount due to, or due by, the traveller. In order to ensure accuracy, they also repeat the verification that the executive office is responsible for.

23. Instances of travel in which there is no deviation from the original travel request present a significant opportunity for eliminating duplication and complexity in the travel process. A procedural change authorizing the programme manager to approve completion of the travel and the Executive Officer to certify compliance with relevant regulations and rules would accomplish this. Using the new procedure and assuming no deviation from the original travel request, the travel process could be finalized within the department or office without the need for a travel claim to be submitted.

24. The recommended change in procedure could eliminate an estimated 50 per cent of the volume of travel claims that are currently submitted to the Travel and Vendor Claims Unit. In addition, the reduction in workload should improve the turnaround time for those travel claims that do need to be submitted.

25. In the administration of staff entitlements, the Office of Internal Oversight Services found that a high volume of transactions, applications and approval processes were labour intensive for both staff and Office of Human Resources

Management personnel. Currently, the Office of Human Resources Management is responsible for entering a staff member's entitlement application into the Integrated Management Information System, checking attached supporting documentation, making copies of documents and filing the application.

26. The Office of Internal Oversight Services analysis of the cost of verifying the staff member's eligibility, checking the supporting documentation, entering data and filing by the administrative staff in the Office of Human Resources Management revealed that the estimated cost per rental subsidy transaction was $390 and the estimated cost per education grant application was $340. Manually processing the form for dependency allowances (P.84) for all Headquarters-based staff was estimated at $537,000 per annum. In total, the administration of staff entitlements by the Office of Human Resources Management costs the Organization an estimated $1.9 million per annum. That amount is an estimate of the current cost of administration and should not be considered to be total savings. The changes recommended would require some resources to be redeployed to other functions, such as the creation of a unit to perform the checking and monitoring of staff entitlement applications.

27. Efforts by the Office of Internal Oversight Services to benchmark United Nations processes against those of other international organizations showed that in many cases those organizations were experiencing the same issues. The World Bank, however, has implemented changes to their staff entitlements and benefits package, which has reduced their cost of administration. The World Bank model for staff entitlements consolidates the rental subsidy, education grant and dependency allowances into a lump sum amount, which is paid quarterly in arrears. The entitlement is called a "mobility premium" and is designed to encourage and reward staff mobility. The entitlement is reduced on a sliding scale to zero in the tenth year, but the cycle restarts at year one each time the staff member changes duty station.

28. While the mobility premium eliminates the cost of administration and promotes staff mobility, it may increase the Organization's total cost for staff entitlements. If the United Nations were to pursue this option, it would need to work closely with the International Civil Service Commission to study the impact of paying staff entitlements on a lump sum basis.

29. The cost estimates for administering staff entitlements as currently done indicate the impact of implementing an online staff entitlement system. Phasing in procedures that shift the responsibility for the application for entitlements from the administrators in the Office of Human Resources Management to the staff member would further streamline the process.

30. The concept of self-certification places the onus of entering accurate personal data on the staff member. In brief, the self-certification procedure requires a staff member to certify the accuracy of the data being presented in support of an application for an entitlement and retain all relevant supporting documentation. Critical requirements for self-certification would be the policies that support this concept and a system within the Office of Human Resources Management to monitor and audit staff entitlement applications. Criteria for the monitoring and auditing system should be designed to identify certain entitlement applications for immediate inspection and also to select applications randomly so that all staff members would be audited in a given period. In certain respects, automated processes can facilitate monitoring, in that data is more accessible and more easily

sorted and analysed. The system could also be configured to flag exceptions or highlight any violations based on pre-defined criteria.

31. At the same time, however, policies need to be developed to ensure that the Organization has recourse in the event of malfeasance. Once the policies are adopted, it is incumbent upon management to apply the policies consistently to ensure that the Organization is not subject to financial loss.

32. Duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the Organization's administrative processes also arise from ineffective internal control procedures, which may add more to the cost of processing than the amount of the risk they are intended to mitigate. The impact of self-certification on processes is significant; however, given the considerable risk in the education grant entitlement, for example, the Office of Internal Oversight Services does not recommend that self-certification be applied to that process initially. The challenge is to find the optimal balance between efficiency and controls, which would ultimately minimize risk to the Organization.

C. Redefining the role of administrative offices

33. Under the current system, the executive offices and administrative units in the offices away from Headquarters are pivotal in the processing of many administrative actions. However, increased automation and increased delegation of authority should reduce the level of involvement required from individual administrative officers and, therefore, expand their role from purely administrative oversight to include other services. In addition, recommended changes to processes will shift the data-input activity to the staff member initiating the transaction. Staff currently performing this activity in the Executive Offices or administrative units could be redeployed to other roles. Identifying their new roles would require further assessment by the Department of Management.

34. Redeployment of administrative staff to other activities, particularly if they were programmatic, would reduce the size of the administrative organization. In March 1997, the Secretary-General committed the Organization to a reduction in its administration and non-programme costs from an estimated 38 per cent of the regular budget to 25 per cent by 2001. While a direct comparison using the 1996 basis for the calculation cannot be accurately performed owing to subsequent restructuring, the Office of Internal Oversight Services has estimated that administration and non-programme costs accounted for 22 per cent of the 2002-2003 regular budget. That figure includes the total appropriations to the Department of Management and the administrative and programme support costs of all United Nations departments and offices as listed in the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (A/56/6/Add.2).

35. There are significant opportunities for further delegation of authority to programme managers and for change in the structure of administrative support services in the departments and offices. Their role is exercised with slight differences. Some departments and offices delegate more authority to the programme managers for approval of administrative transactions and hold programme managers accountable for expenditures and budgets. Others adopt an approach requiring programme managers to submit individual transactions to the executive office for certification and approval, thereby introducing an additional

level of review, duplicating the role of the programme manager and undermining the substantive basis for the transaction.

36. The Office of Internal Oversight Services recommends that the role of the executive office be defined more specifically in view of changes to processes that will rely on the accountability and delegated authority of the programme manager for substantive decisions. Those changes should eliminate duplication, streamline processes and keep the focus on the activity and content of the mission rather than on the process.

37. Duplication can be further eliminated by consolidating the delivery of common support services, which may currently be duplicated in many areas of the Organization, into central regional agencies. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that centralizing services such as job application processing, staff entitlements and payroll would eliminate duplication and increase cost-effectiveness and efficiency, particularly for offices away from Headquarters and peacekeeping missions. Centralizing service delivery in certain areas would also realize economies of scale and leverage specialized skills.

38. The preceding model for centralization does not imply less delegation of authority to the programme managers. The authority to make decisions and approve transactions can continue to be delegated to appropriate levels in the Organization, while centralizing only the actual delivery of services. However, centralizing delivery of administrative support services depends on some key elements, including:

- Automation of processes
- Consolidation of the Integrated Management Information System databases, and real-time access to data across all duty stations
- Clear definition of the terms of service-level agreements

39. *The Department of Management, in its response to the draft report, pointed out that centralizing the delivery of common services was a major shift that would have implications for the allocation of the budget and human resources across organizational units and duty stations, and that consideration of those issues should not be overlooked.*

D. Managing the integration of process improvements

40. The most important issue in the development or enhancement of systems and processes is the recognition that the Organization needs to be more strategic and adopt an enterprise-wide approach that is designed to meet the needs of the entire Organization rather than just a department. The integrated automation of travel, procurement and administration of staff entitlements processes are specific examples of how the Organization can develop more efficient and cost-effective administrative mechanisms while simplifying processes and reducing the risk of errors.

41. The Office of Internal Oversight Services established a steering group named the Project Management Office, whose tenure was limited to the duration of the present review. Relevant stakeholders in the Department of Management and in executive offices were invited to participate. The role of the Project Management

Office was to develop a business case that would form the basis of the report's recommendations and address any cross-cutting issues that might arise.

42. The Project Management Office was unanimous in its support for a coordinated and consolidated approach to the implementation of process improvement recommendations that would ensure the following:

- That an organization-wide view of the implementation would be taken when decisions regarding priority of activities were made
- That synergies in the development process would be maximized to reduce project costs
- That the systems designed would be scalable, portable and capable of interfacing with the Integrated Management Information System, which is the United Nations official record-keeping system, and that they would be aligned with the Organization's information and communications technology strategy
- That consolidated information systems would allow access to data across all duty stations and that applications, when implemented, would have the same "look and feel" and facilitate ease of training.

43. The collaborative approach to enterprise-wide system development, as demonstrated by the activities of the Project Management Office, is a major accomplishment. If departments were to approach implementation individually, there would be a risk that the design would only meet the requirements of the department sponsoring the development, thereby missing the opportunity to build an application that would integrate all the systems in the Organization. The joint approach has the further advantage of establishing a more comprehensive and compelling case for the resources required.

44. The Office of Human Resources staff selection system, "Galaxy", for example, is a sound concept that was developed without additional resources. The Office of Internal Oversight Services believes that Galaxy could have been a superior application, particularly in terms of its integration with existing systems, if the initial project design had been approached with an enterprise-wide perspective.

45. The replacement of the Organization's procurement systems could become a test of the concept for this approach. There are currently two procurement applications in the Organization: one used by Headquarters and offices away from Headquarters, and the other used by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and in peacekeeping missions. In addition, the procurement application in every location has a separate database, which has resulted in as many vendor databases and catalogues.

46. In focus group meetings the Procurement Division articulated its vision for an organization-wide procurement system that would eliminate the duplication of vendor databases and provide data for improved procurement decisions. While the Procurement Division and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations would be the main users of an organization-wide procurement system, other considerations, such as the interface with the Integrated Management Information System, make it imperative that any initiative to identify an organization-wide procurement system include all the stakeholders.

47. Although there are development initiatives in progress — namely, the Office of Human Resources Management Galaxy e-Benefits module designed for the administration of staff entitlements and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations planned development of a field-based procurement system — the developers should be aware of the need for an Organization-wide solution.

48. The business case of the Project Management Office recommended that a needs analysis be conducted as a first step to the development of new systems, particularly for procurement and staff entitlements. The needs analysis would ensure selection of the best solution and identify in detail the technology and associated cost of implementation. It would also enable a proper cost-benefit analysis and provide a quantitative basis for making decisions regarding implementation.

E. Change management

49. Interviews with both staff and management revealed that reform initiatives to streamline processes had been attempted several times in the past, but few significant process changes resulted. Others commented on the resistance to change in the Organization.

50. The Office of Internal Oversight Services reviewed prior efforts to re-engineer processes, particularly the work of the Efficiency Board as reported in 1996, and found that several of the change and improvement initiatives listed in the report under illustrative projects were not implemented. The Office of Internal Oversight Services research provided evidence that, in several cases, competing priorities for limited resources and the demands of the programme of work were responsible for the lower priority of the efficiency projects. In addition, at that time no strong guidance or steering committee was present to monitor the implementation of reform initiatives.

51. The implementation of the recommendations is as much an exercise in changing processes and implementing new procedures and systems as it is an exercise in getting staff members to accept the changes as beneficial to them. The effort to implement process improvements must provide for this when establishing the project and ensure that adequately skilled change management resources are available to the project team.

VI. Recommendations

52. The recommendations that follow are in many instances based on ideas that have emerged from consultations with management and staff in the Department of Management.

53. The Department of Management should establish a project team consisting of representatives from the Information and Communications Technology Board, the Management Policy Office, the Travel and Transportation Section, the Travel and Vendor Claims Unit, the Office of Human Resources Management, the Information and Technology Services Division, the Integrated Management Information System Service, and the Procurement Division, for the purpose of commissioning a detailed needs analysis.

54. *The Department of Management believes that rather than creating another group to implement this recommendation, it should become the priority of the Department of Management's Information and Communications Technology Committee.*

55. The needs analysis should identify the best technology options and funding requirements for implementing the following recommendations:

(a) Automate the travel process to provide staff with an electronic travel request form interfaced with the Integrated Management Information System and an electronic travel claim form, that would use data available in the system;

(b) Identify an Organization-wide application for procurement, which would be used at Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters and peacekeeping missions. The system must provide online requisitioning, an electronic catalogue and a single central vendor database;

(c) Further automate the processes for rental subsidy, education grant and dependency allowances to provide staff with access to their personal details and electronic forms for applying for entitlements (MC-03-001-001).*

56. *The Department of Management agreed with the recommendations to automate the travel process, identify an Organization-wide procurement system and enhance the staff entitlement system to provide staff with an online application facility and electronic validation of eligibility.*

57. *However, before automating the processes, the Department of Management will perform a review of the underlying policies and rules. The review should result in the documentation of business processes and form the basis of the new system to be developed. Work has already been done in the area of dependency benefits, and a report on amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules will be submitted to the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly recommending the removal of the requirement that staff submit dependency allowance applications annually and in writing.*

58. The Department of Management should issue an administrative instruction to introduce the following changes to the procedure for finalizing travel that did not deviate from the authorized itinerary:

(a) The programme manager should be authorized to approve valid travel completed for values up to the specified limit of his/her authority;

(b) The executive officer must certify compliance with relevant regulations and rules (MC-03-001-002).

59. *The Department of Management fully supports this recommendation. The Department of Management suggests that since travel advances and travel claims are processes within the purview of the Accounts Division, the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts should take the lead in this regard.*

* The symbols in parentheses in the present section refer to an internal code used by the Office of Internal Oversight Services for recording recommendations.

60. The Department of Management should issue an administrative instruction on information and communications technology security and data privacy to ensure that specific guidelines are given to all staff for the management of user identities and passwords. The administrative instruction should establish the validity of electronic approval and the accountability that derives from it (MC-03-001-003).

61. *The Department of Management agrees with the recommendations to issue applicable instruments in setting out policies on security and data privacy, as well as the basis for appropriate electronic approvals and the accountability mechanism arising from those procedures.*

62. The Department of Management should issue an administrative instruction detailing the processes that will be subject to staff self-certification. The administrative instruction should also specify the following:

(a) The statement of statutory declaration that the staff members will be required to sign;

(b) That documentation will be liable to audit at any time and that it is the Organization's right to audit the documentation at a later date;

(c) That documentation must be provided by the staff member on demand and within a specified period of time;

(d) The consequences for staff for non-compliance (MC-03-001-004).

63. *The Department of Management agrees with this recommendation and will determine a more appropriate way to go: for example, whether to issue a general administrative instruction on staff self-certification, as suggested, or introduce and explain the certification process in the administrative instructions governing the specific entitlements. This will allow staff to read only one administrative instruction, rather than two: an administrative instruction on the education grant or the rental subsidy, and then another on the manner in which they should proceed.*

64. The Department of Management should take steps to redefine the role of the executive office and the administrative officers in departments and offices to reflect the changes resulting from procedural improvements and increased delegation of authority to the programme manager (MC-03-001-005).

65. *The Department of Management agrees with the recommendation, and it is being addressed in the context of the review of the delegation of authority. It is expected that the review will redefine the role of the Department of Management and related offices such as the executive offices.*

66. The Department of Management should take steps to prevent further duplication of computerized systems in the Organization by doing the following:

(a) Creating and maintaining a central registry for systems;

(b) Instructing departments and offices to submit proposals for new systems development projects to the Information and Communications Technology Board for approval;

(c) Making the registry accessible to all staff through the Intranet (MC-03-001-006).

67. *The Department of Management has already made substantial progress with the implementation of this recommendation. A central registry for systems has already been implemented; the draft information and communications technology review committee terms of reference have been prepared; and a central registry for systems is currently available on the Intranet.*

(*Signed*) Dileep **Nair**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

United Nations A/58/212

General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 August 2003

Original: English

Fifty-eighth session
Item 119 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report describes the work of the United Nations over the previous biennium in providing electoral assistance, and in particular in implementing General Assembly resolutions 54/173 and 56/159. It presents an analytical framework that describes the role that elections play in furthering a number of goals of the Organization, including conflict prevention, peace-building and development. Stressing the role of the focal point for electoral assistance activities, it describes how the various parts of the United Nations system work in close coordination to provide electoral assistance that is effective, prompt and consistent with the body of experience that has been built up over the previous decade. In describing technical assistance provided to Member States, the report notes a number of new and increasingly complex trends, including that of providing support to technology-based systems and to increase popular participation in elections through improved electoral registration exercises. The report also describes how electoral assistance is increasingly incorporated into major United Nations peacekeeping and peace-building missions, and notes the value of including electoral experts at political negotiations aimed at ending or preventing conflicts. Finally, the report signals that the United Nations electoral assistance mechanisms will need to be enhanced if they are to continue to provide effective and quality support in the face of steadily increasing demands for such support.

* A/58/150.

** The present report was delayed owing to the need to reflect information provided by a variety of sources.

03-45182 (E) 270803

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I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 56/159 of 19 December 2001 and covers electoral activities undertaken by the United Nations in the period since the previous report on this subject (A/56/344), issued on 19 October 2001.

2. The involvement of the United Nations in electoral activities is rooted in the Organization's responsibility to cooperate with Member States to promote the basic rights enumerated in the Charter of the United Nations and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 21 of the Declaration states that "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives", and that "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures."

3. It has become clear over the years that where these rights to political participation were not respected, political oppression became the norm, often leading to either the explosion of societies through violence, or implosion through lasting tyranny. The guiding principle of United Nations electoral activities is therefore to assist Governments, at their request, to ensure that the people whom they govern are able to play a free and active role in choosing their Governments.

4. Experience has also shown that, just as the price of exclusion is often violence, the benefit of political inclusion is a much better prospect of stability. The free and fair competition of various political interests through effective institutions provides a non-violent avenue for resolving differences within a polity, and the outcome of this process tends towards a just mean that removes the incentive for violence. Political stability, thus achieved, in turn provides the basis for economic development and, often, for peaceful relations between States. Elections are simultaneously a mechanism for conflict prevention and peace-building, and thus condition the success of a large number of United Nations activities carried out by a large number of agencies, organs and funds.

5. The United Nations essentially provides four categories of electoral assistance: (a) technical assistance; (b) the organization and conduct of elections; (c) observation or monitoring of elections; and (d) participation where elections are expected to play a significant role in the peace-building phase of political negotiations. This assistance is provided in two sorts of political contexts: those that are politically stable, and conflict or post-conflict contexts. Technical assistance tends to be provided in politically stable contexts, while the organization and conduct of elections happens almost exclusively under post-conflict conditions (for example, East Timor; see paras. 44-46 below). The fourth category of assistance, participation in the context of peace negotiations, is a relatively recent development, though recent experience (for example, in the occupied Palestinian territory; see para. 36 below) suggests that it is highly valuable and should be encouraged.

6. The provision of technical assistance continues to increase in complexity. This is in part because an earlier generation of electoral reforms has been consolidated and countries are now demanding more specific and specialized reforms. The introduction of new voting technologies (see paras. 29-31 below) has added further complexity to technical assistance, which demands increased specialization. At the

same time, the demand for technical assistance continues to grow, confirming trends reported in the previous report. The growing emphasis on capacity-building, in particular, has led to several new pilot projects, such as new methodologies developed by the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections project (see para. 23 below) that will have broad implications for sustainability. The United Nations continues to receive a growing number of requests, due to its experience, its impartiality and the legitimacy it imparts, and because Member States are confident that the United Nations is able to provide electoral assistance while fully respecting national sovereignty.

7. Contrary to previous expectations, the provision of electoral assistance as a component of major peacekeeping and peace-building missions has increased rather than decreased. During the review period, the Electoral Assistance Division has worked with major United Nations Missions in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone. This is in part a reflection of the fact that the number of missions has increased in response to recent geopolitical events, but also a reflection of increasing recognition of the role that elections can play in solidifying peace-building efforts and providing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that can replace the use of violence. The complexity of these forms of assistance has also increased. For this reason, new methodologies, such as the feasibility study conducted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see paras. 53-54 below), provide a tool to ensure the consistency of international aid to the electoral process. The role of voter education, in particular, becomes an extremely important mechanism to re-enfranchise people who, after years of war, have ceased to consider themselves as political agents with objective rights.

8. As the provision of technical assistance has increased, requests for direct United Nations electoral observation has decreased. This is in part because the United Nations never observes elections that it organizes or conducts, owing to the obvious conflict of interests. Nonetheless, during the review period, the United Nations coordinated international observers in Sierra Leone, carried out an observation mission for the elections in Fiji in 1999 and monitored the 2000 elections in Solomon Islands.

9. The United Nations system has responded to the increase in quantity and complexity of requests over the previous biennium by doing more with existing resources through enhanced cooperation with partners inside and outside the system. A threshold has been reached, however, beyond which greater resources will be required if the United Nations is to be able to effectively respond to all justified requests.

II. Implementation of General Assembly resolutions 54/173 and 56/159

A. Consolidation of electoral assistance capacities within the United Nations system

10. Given the wide variety of sectors on which electoral activities ultimately have an impact, the United Nations system must work as a single body. The note of guidance attached to the previous report (A/56/344, annex II) continues to form the basis for this cooperation. The development, in practice, of excellent working

relationships with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has ensured that the United Nations system is providing electoral assistance in a coherent and consistent manner all over the world.

11. The consistency of electoral assistance is a key element of its credibility, and a key function of the consolidation of electoral assistance capacities within the United Nations system. As required by the note of guidance, the United Nations focal point for electoral assistance activities, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, continues to play an essential role as the first formal point of contact for the receipt and evaluation of assistance requests. The Electoral Assistance Division continues to assist the focal point in evaluating these requests, coordinating the provision of electoral assistance by the United Nations system and ensuring a consistent application of standards for the duration of a given project. This methodology removes randomness from the consideration of requests and ensures a standardized approach to the provision of electoral assistance. A consistent approach to technical assistance ensures that key factors, such as the widest possible enfranchisement of voters and the existence of a free press, are respected in democratic processes. And while the design and implementation of each electoral assistance project takes into account the particularities of the local context, it does not do so at the expense of global consistency.

12. Consistency is also enhanced by having adequate time for assistance requests to be considered. The note of guidance therefore refers to a lead time of four months prior to the scheduled elections. This is to allow sufficient time for the conduct of a needs-assessment mission, resource mobilization and the recruitment and deployment of appropriate international expertise prior to the holding of elections. The procedures outlined in the note of guidance have, during the past biennium, helped Member States to submit requests earlier than before and this in turn has enabled the Electoral Assistance Division to respond positively in an increasing number of cases and to enhance the quality of the assistance it provides.

13. In accordance with its mandate, the Electoral Assistance Division maintains a roster of election experts that now includes approximately 1,100 individuals from every region, with a variety of language skills, fields of expertise and levels of experience. Some 25 per cent of the experts on the roster are women. The Division would welcome additional candidates for the roster; details and minimum requirements are available on the Division's web site (www.un.org/dpa/ead).

14. The focal point also acts, through the Electoral Assistance Division, as a clearing house for election-related information. This role is enhanced by the Division's relationships with organizations both inside (see paras. 15-21 below) and outside (see paras. 22-25 below) the United Nations system, and with the electoral commissions of a number of Member States.

B. Coordination in the United Nations system

15. Depending on the type of assistance to be provided, UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are two primary partners of the Electoral Assistance Division. Over the past two years, cooperation with UNDP has steadily increased. The field presence of UNDP has been invaluable in facilitating timely responses to requests and mobilizing resources to meet them; its field offices also serve as partners for long-term assistance. Most technical assistance projects are

implemented and directly executed by UNDP field offices to ensure that assistance is fully neutral and outside the influence of specific government institutions. After the initial needs assessment, review of project documents and selection of experts, the role of the Division may range from technical backstopping to full engagement. In other cases, however, the Division remains a fully engaged and active partner throughout the project.

16. In order to strengthen cooperation between the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP bureaux at the headquarters level, the five Deputy Directors of the UNDP regional and policy bureaux have been designated the main interlocutors for electoral activities in their respective regions. This complements the coordinating mechanisms that already exist (such as participation by Division staff in "cluster meetings" of Resident Coordinators and the holding of regular meetings between the focal point for electoral assistance activities and the UNDP Administrator) and has contributed to the more regular holding of consultations.

17. Over the past two years, the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP have worked together to design and implement several longer-term and more complex technical assistance projects than have been conducted in the past. Unlike more traditional technical assistance projects, which require approximately six months, the average duration of these more comprehensive projects is more than a year. The role of the Division is to identify appropriate experts and provide substantive monitoring of project activities and achievements.

18. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is a key partner when peacekeeping missions include an electoral component. Most recently, the Electoral Assistance Division has worked most closely with the Department in planning electoral assistance in the context of three major missions: the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. The Division also cooperates closely with the Department's Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, and a chapter on elections has been included in the peacekeeping handbook prepared by that Unit.

19. The Electoral Assistance Division also provides support to the United Nations system through the provision of expert advisory service missions. These missions address a critical stage preceding electoral projects, at which informal discussions occur between the Government and representatives of the United Nations, normally in preparation for an electoral request to the United Nations system, and have proved beneficial in maintaining high-quality and consistent responses to the enquiries of Governments.

20. Additional United Nations partners include the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV) and the United Nations Office for Project Services. A note of guidance is being negotiated with OHCHR, and existing cooperation modalities with UNV are being institutionalized to make them more efficient.

21. Within the United Nations Secretariat, the Electoral Assistance Division has continued its close working relationship with the regional divisions of the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, consulting with them prior to and throughout the conduct of relevant electoral assistance projects. The Division also participates, as requested, in meetings of the

Executive Committee on Peace and Security, the Department of Political Affairs Prevention Team and other interdepartmental task forces when issues relating to elections are discussed.

C. Cooperation with other organizations

22. The Electoral Assistance Division has continued to build on its relationships with non-United Nations organizations and to seek new partners as opportunities arise for new forms of collaboration and assistance. The development of ties with regional organizations such as the African Union, the Organization of American States and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has continued, facilitating a useful international distribution of work and ensuring consistency of approach among the international providers of electoral assistance. A staff member of the Division visited Addis Ababa in early 2002 to assist the African Union with its plans to create an electoral unit. Two technical consultants were later recruited by the Division to follow up with the implementation of the plan.

23. The Electoral Assistance Division has continued its cooperation with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IIDEA) in various projects and conferences relating to the strengthening of electoral management bodies and increasing citizen engagement in electoral processes. The Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) project[1] has been undertaken by the Division, IIDEA and the Australian Electoral Commission to provide a basis for capacity-development programmes.

24. Based on its positive experience in working together with the Australian Election Commission, Elections Canada and the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico, the Electoral Assistance Division has established new partnerships with several national election administrations through the signing of memorandums of understanding with their Governments. In the past two years, memorandums of understanding have been signed with Argentina, Brazil and Panama, and discussions are currently under way with representatives of India. Among the goals of such relationships are exchange of knowledge and experience, expansion of the United Nations roster of electoral assistance experts, enhanced coordination of activities, exchange of experts and the provision of personnel and logistical and technical assistance for United Nations electoral activities.

25. The second Global Electoral Organization (GEO) Network Conference was held in March 2003, hosted by the Mexican Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). In addition to IFE and the Government of Mexico, IIDEA, Elections Canada and the Electoral Assistance Division sponsored the conference, which brought together a global group of regional associations of election officers, thus helping create a network of electoral associations to establish partnership opportunities and share experiences in the development of association programmes and capacities.

[1] BRIDGE, divided into 10 modules, provides a theoretical background and series of lesson plans to impart the knowledge and skills that mid- to executive-level electoral administrators require. The BRIDGE project provides a broad basis upon which country-specific programmes can be customized and delivered under a variety of circumstances.

III. Experience of the United Nations

26. Over the past two years, the United Nations received 52 requests for electoral assistance from Member States and one request from a non-member State. At the same time, work continued on a number of projects that carried over from requests for assistance made during the previous biennium. Of the 52 new requests, the majority (26) were for technical assistance. Three major electoral missions, in East Timor, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, were supported during that period, and advance planning began for a future electoral mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Coordination and support for international observers were provided in Bangladesh, Comoros, East Timor, Lesotho and Nepal. In several cases, more than one request for assistance was submitted by the same Member State. Due to the long-term nature of the involvement required by some of the requests, assistance in eight countries was carried over from requests that had originated before September 2001.

27. On the basis of formal and timely requests, needs-assessment missions were conducted in 34 requesting States. More details concerning the conduct of needs-assessment missions are contained in paragraphs 32 and 33 of the previous report of the Secretary-General (A/56/344) and on the United Nations web site.

A. Technical assistance

28. The most recent statistics maintained by the Electoral Assistance Division confirmed that, as noted in previous reports (A/54/491 and A/56/344), technical assistance continues to be the most widely requested form of assistance provided by the United Nations. Such assistance can take many forms, but frequently involves specific electoral processes such as registration, training of polling officers, civic education and comprehensive advisory support for national election administrations. In carrying out electoral assistance, the Division has made specific efforts to address gender mainstreaming. These have included: (a) the creation of a subsection of the electoral roster for gender mainstreaming experts; (b) commissioning a major study on gender mainstreaming in elections, looking particularly at how the participation of women in elections as both voters and candidates can be increased; (c) a project on enhancing women's participation as voters and candidates in Jordan, undertaken with the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women; and (d) adopting women's inclusion as a principal planning concern in the design of the voter registration exercise in Afghanistan, including through special measures such as the use of all-female registration teams.

29. One area of particular interest is the use of computer technology in the electoral process. Member States are turning more and more to technology in order to reduce the cost of elections and make the process more efficient. Computerized systems offer a variety of advantages, from better access for the disabled to faster tallying and earlier announcement of results. At the same time, there is a risk that new technologies, if not implemented with sufficient consideration of the systems with which they have to be integrated, can lead to the effective disenfranchisement of voters and lack of trust in the process, and even open the door to problems of sustainability in cases where electoral commissions are unprepared.

30. The United Nations has received a steadily growing number of requests from Member States to assist in evaluating the use or proposed implementation of these new and emerging electoral technologies. Increasingly, the Organization is being requested to provide an impartial assessment of the quality of these systems and to assist Member States' electoral authorities in determining the impact on upcoming elections, as well as those in the not-so-near term. These assessments combine a diverse assortment of issues, including considerations of hardware and software standards, legislative reform, concerns of sustainability and cost, civic and voter education strategies, security and training of personnel.

31. These assessments, and the subsequent assistance in connection with such technology-related requests, are complicated by the absence of universally accepted standards for the hardware or software involved and the scarcity and high cost of experts able to make such evaluations.

32. The second factor that has contributed to the high demand for technical assistance is the field presence of UNDP. UNDP is able to provide continual and long-term support that goes beyond the types of assistance that can be provided in the time-pressured context of an immediate electoral process, and includes post-electoral assistance. The presence of UNDP field offices also provides a constant platform from which short-term projects can be launched in a timely and cost-effective manner. The Electoral Assistance Division, working with UNDP, has carried out both short-term projects, in which assistance was provided for no longer than necessary to address specific problems, and longer-term projects, of several years or more.

33. Such long-term projects were conducted in Nigeria and Yemen. In Nigeria, a two-year project was undertaken to support the April 2003 general elections. The project focused on supporting civil society organizations throughout the country by financing civic education and projects to pre ent electoral violence. In addition, the project supported a consortium of civil society organizations in the training and deployment of about 10,000 domestic observers. In Yemen, a project was designed in early 2002 to support the organization and conduct of the April 2003 parliamentary and local elections, and to provide post-election support. UNDP and the Electoral Assistance Division mobilized more than $2.2 million from the international community to finance the first phase of a planned four-year capacity-building programme for the Supreme Commission for Elections and Referenda. In May 2003, the first phase was successfully completed and a thorough evaluation conducted. A longer-term objective of the project, institutional capacity-building, will be consolidated in subsequent phases (2003-2006).

34. In Jamaica, on the other hand, at the request of the Government in advance of the 2002 parliamentary elections, the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP developed a short-term programme to support and enhance the investigative and legal capacities of the Jamaican electoral authorities and Political Ombudsman. The support was aimed at helping these authorities to investigate electoral complaints more rapidly and consistently in order to minimize periods of uncertainty following elections and reduce political violence. While the impact of this assistance is difficult to quantify, in contrast to the previous election no deaths were attributed to political violence in the 2002 election and post-election environment.

35. Over the past two years, technical assistance has been increasingly requested in countries that are considering a major review and reform of existing systems.

These requests may reflect a perceived lack of public trust in the existing system or a desire to update and modernize. In Colombia, the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP are conducting a six-month preparatory assistance programme aimed at reforming Colombia's electoral system. The programme addresses institution-building, capacity-building, civic education, political party development and the civil registration process. A major innovation of the project was the decision, negotiated with the Colombian Government, to prepare an inventory of all previous reform initiatives, many of which overlapped or contradicted each other. The inventory exercise allows for the preparation of a critical path towards a coherent reform, and the electoral assistance project in Colombia is assisting the Government to manage this complex reform process.

36. In another innovative but sui generis project, in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP have begun working with the Palestinian Authority to build an institutional capacity to hold elections. The road map to resolve the Middle East crisis calls for elections to be held in the occupied Palestinian territories but does not specify when. The United Nations recognized that, given the nature of the political process, elections could be called at short notice; it was therefore imperative that the local institutions be capable of holding elections whenever they were called. A failure to be able to hold elections for technical, rather than political, reasons could lead to outright violence or could gradually sap the momentum of the process. It was also recognized that technical decisions regarding the elections could be taken in an environment that would be less politically charged than a pre-election environment, when all political actors are focused on the upcoming polling.

37. Technical assistance requests frequently relate to the establishment, amendment or assessment of voter registration exercises and their associated record storage systems. Two key trends have been identified: an increasing computerization of voter rolls in established democracies (see para. 29 above) and the increasing inclusion of voter registration exercises as features of transitional processes in post-conflict countries (for example, in Sierra Leone, the occupied Palestinian territories and Afghanistan). This trend has emerged as a response to two factors: the need to prepare for a genuine election with certifiable levels of enfranchisement within a short time frame, and a lack of accurate information about the distribution of the adult citizenship within the country.

38. Within an election process, voter registration provides an example of the intersection of political interests and the technical and mechanical preparations for an election. Knowledgeable politicians recognize that elections can potentially be won or lost at this stage of the process. Thus, the efficiency and equity (real and perceived) with which a registration exercise is conducted are highly politicized and scrutinized matters.

39. A fundamental shift in the registration process has been greater consideration of the use of civil registration databases as the source of voter rolls. In most situations, the information about persons required to produce an electoral roll can be extracted from a civil register, thus reducing the overall expenditure of government resources in two similar processes. The political credibility of this approach can be undermined, however, when electoral authorities must cede some control of the process, often to more politicized ministries, and thus cannot provide guarantees of independence, as normally expected by political parties.

40. The United Nations has been called upon to provide assistance in voter registration exercises throughout the world in several ways: in transitional countries, such as Afghanistan, to substantively engage in the actual organization and conduct of the registration exercise; in countries undertaking revisions to the registration process, such as in the occupied Palestinian territories, to provide expert technical assistance in determining the most appropriate methodology and the operational activities to be followed; in countries amending or creating their registration systems, such as Sierra Leone, as an implementing partner; and, for countries that have undertaken or completed amendments to the registration system, such as Jamaica, auditing the process as an impartial third party to provide a qualitative assessment of the outcome.

41. These examples highlight the increasing variety of election expertise that is now requested from the United Nations, as well as the possibilities and potential value of longer-term technical assistance projects. At the same time, the depth of knowledge required and the duration of many such projects have expanded significantly. Each of these factors has a significant impact on the planning and implementation of United Nations electoral assistance: the increased resources required for such services must be carefully mobilized, with substantive backstopping provided throughout the project lifetime.

B. Major electoral missions

42. During the mid-1990s, the number of major electoral missions declined significantly, raising expectations that they would continue to decline and that electoral assistance would be provided less and less in the context of peacekeeping missions. The events of recent years, however, have belied those expectations, as the number of missions has risen and elections are increasingly seen as an essential aspect of peace-building.

43. The increase in intra-State conflict during the late 1990s led to several peacekeeping missions that included an electoral component, in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Tajikistan. As the United Nations assisted in resolving the status of East Timor, the road to independence was marked by important electoral events over the course of three years. These and other major electoral operations have reaffirmed the need for effective advance planning, ready access to adequate human and financial resources and a commitment to sustained and often multifaceted support. Although electoral processes normally involve similar sets of components, the conditions and constraints of each new electoral context frequently pose unprecedented challenges. Recent experience in East Timor, and current planning for future electoral processes in Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, highlight the continuing complexity of major electoral operations.

East Timor/Timor-Leste

44. Following the 1999 popular consultation regarding the future status of East Timor, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was established with a mandate to organize and conduct several cycles of elections leading to East Timorese independence. The elections for the Constituent Assembly, held on 30 August 2001, were peaceful and enjoyed a voter turnout of 91.3 per cent. This was the first election in which the Timorese elected their own representatives.

UNTAET began preparations for the 2002 presidential election soon after the Constituent Assembly election, emphasizing capacity-building for Timorese electoral staff.

45. The experience of the United Nations with the political transition of Timor-Leste to independence highlighted several potential dilemmas that may be instructive for the future. For example, the United Nations and the East Timorese agreed that it was the role of the independent Timorese Government, and not the United Nations Transitional Administration, to determine the post-independence electoral system. As a partial consequence, however, planning for the establishment of a post-independence Timor-Leste electoral commission or management body was neglected in the press of urgent issues that needed to be resolved at independence. As a remedy, the Transitional Administrator and Special Representative of the Secretary-General took steps on the eve of independence to ensure that an interim Independent Electoral Commission would be established as soon as possible on the basis of Timorese nominations. An interim Independent Electoral Commission was officially appointed by the Prime Minister in November 2002.

46. The post-independence Government decided in early 2003 to begin holding local elections in October 2003. The Government of Timor-Leste requested technical assistance from the Electoral Assistance Division for these elections. Although the United Nations does not usually provide electoral assistance for subnational level elections, the Division responded positively to the request, given the special role the United Nations had played in Timor-Leste's independence and democratization process. With guidance from the United Nations Mission in East Timor, which succeeded UNTAET after Timor-Leste's independence, the Division has enlisted the cooperation of UNDP for this assistance in order to ensure timely and comprehensive coverage of the Government's needs.

Sierra Leone

47. In May 2001 the National Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone requested United Nations logistical, technical and security assistance for the organization and conduct of the 2002 presidential and parliamentary elections. Following two needs-assessment missions in 2001, an electoral component was established within the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). On the basis of Security Council resolution 1389 (2002), UNAMSIL began the task of fulfilling the requests of the National Electoral Commission.

48. Given that UNAMSIL provided technical, logistical and security assistance for the elections of 14 May 2002, it refrained from observing those elections, though it did provide support for 207 independent international observers. This support included the provision of briefing materials and deployment plans and the facilitation of observer accreditation with the electoral authorities. Despite a number of operational difficulties, the presidential and parliamentary elections of 14 May were conducted peacefully and with an impressive turnout.

Afghanistan

49. The Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions (the Bonn Agreement), signed on 5 December 2001, requests the United Nations to carry out a voter registration exercise prior to the holding of elections in June 2004 to elect a fully representative

Government. On 15 February 2003, President Karzai wrote to the Secretary-General requesting the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) to play an essential role in the preparation and organization of the election. The Secretary-General acceded to this request in a letter to President Karzai on 3 March 2003.

50. Prior to this exchange of letters, and the formalization of the United Nations role in assisting Afghan elections, the Electoral Assistance Division had dispatched two missions to Afghanistan: a preliminary assessment mission from 17 to 24 August 2002 and a needs-assessment mission from 31 October to 10 November 2002. In March 2003, the Division dispatched a team of consultants to UNAMA to begin planning the electoral registration process and designing the UNAMA electoral unit that would be responsible for coordinating and implementing all UNAMA electoral assistance. The Division worked with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York and with UNAMA to prepare a supplementary budget for the establishment of the electoral unit and submit it to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in May 2003. Recruitment and deployment of staff from the roster of electoral experts began immediately. The bulk of the registration exercise, however, as well as capacity-building for the Afghan electoral authorities, will have to be funded through voluntary contributions.

51. The Afghan elections pose a number of political, logistical, administrative and security-related challenges. There have never been elections in Afghanistan of the scope and standard that are being called for now. A voter registry does not exist, and many Afghans lack any form of official identity papers. There is no electoral commission, electoral law or political party law. Two decades of war resulted in massive population flows, and these have continued during the peace process as refugees — 2.2 million of whom were repatriated in 2002 — continue to return to Afghanistan. Registering the refugee population, internally displaced persons and nomadic communities will be particularly challenging. The need to register and enfranchise women will also require a major effort, given entrenched social traditions, particularly in rural areas. Above all, the security situation remains unstable and has deteriorated in many areas. Throughout most of 2003, nearly a third of the country has been off limits to United Nations agencies because of poor security.

52. To overcome these obstacles, the Electoral Assistance Division, UNAMA and the Afghan Transitional Administration will continue to work closely to implement the terms of the Bonn Agreement and prepare the way for general elections to be held by June 2004.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

53. The Electoral Assistance Division is currently conducting a feasibility study for the conduct of future elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Based on the provisional constitution of the country, the conduct of elections is intended to consolidate the political transition, culminating in the inauguration of the post-transition President of the Republic.

54. The feasibility study marks a novel approach whereby electoral assistance will be designed through the elaboration of a comprehensive set of options with associated benefits, costs, risks and corresponding steps for implementation. The study will begin on 28 and 29 July 2003, soon after the establishment of the

transitional Government, and will be followed by a month of data collection in the field. It is anticipated that the study will be completed during the last quarter of 2003. The study will provide multiple paths for the organization of elections in a country where the physical and institutional structures are either non-existent or embryonic (the most recent census took place in 1984 and the last popular consultation was held in 1964). Particular attention will be devoted to legal issues, logistics and questions relating to the choice of an electoral system. For the international community, the study will contribute to increased understanding and definition of its own role as the process moves forward. It was possible to carry out the feasibility study only because funds earmarked for the Democratic Republic of the Congo had earlier been provided by the Belgian Government to the United Nations Trust Fund for Electoral Observation (see para. 59 below), and were therefore available when it was determined that such a study should be carried out. The United Nations and other electoral assistance organizations may find the methodology of the study useful not only in their work with the Democratic Republic of the Congo but in advance planning for other complex electoral situations.

55. Each of the above-mentioned major missions highlights the importance of advance planning, availability of necessary resources and flexibility in addressing difficult and often changing field conditions. The availability of financial resources is particularly critical, since the timing and scope of such electoral missions is unpredictable until a mandate is provided for an initial needs-assessment mission. As a consequence, resources for such missions cannot be specified as part of a regular budgetary cycle. Since the organization of major electoral missions will continue for the foreseeable future, the need to develop modalities for rapid resource mobilization is a priority.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Challenges

56. The most important challenge facing the Electoral Assistance Division stems from its increased workload. This problem is a product of success. Major missions that were not anticipated at the end of the last biennium, including those in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and possibly Iraq, will make significant demands on the Division in the coming biennium. At the same time, requests for technical assistance are likely to grow in number and in complexity, and some cases, such as those of the occupied Palestinian territories and Indonesia, will require very significant support from the Division.

57. In order to meet these demands, the Electoral Assistance Division requires additional resources, in terms of both staff and finances. The existing pool of electoral staff will be severely taxed over the next several years. The quality of United Nations electoral assistance depends on the availability of properly trained staff. Even those who are deployed temporarily must undergo a minimum of electoral training. Electoral experts for longer-term missions need to have a solid understanding of electoral issues, the political dynamics of the areas to which they are deployed and the United Nations system itself.

58. In anticipation of the upcoming need for electoral experts, the Electoral Assistance Division will need the flexibility to be able to rapidly expand and contract, depending on the status of each of its projects. This need, as well as that of consistency, would best be met by tapping into capacities that already exist in the United Nations system. It would be highly useful, for example, for institutional relationships within the United Nations system to be developed to allow for the temporary secondment of United Nations staff, both in the field and at headquarters, for the purpose of participating during peak periods in electoral operations. This could be assisted by the development of an internal United Nations roster of electoral experts, who could be considered for various tasks depending on levels of training that could be provided through the United Nations Staff College. This process would almost certainly benefit from more efficient inter-agency procedures for the secondment and loan of staff than those currently in place. In particular, other parts of the United Nations system should be encouraged to consider as a priority the secondment of their staff for electoral activities.

59. The primary mechanism for meeting financial demands is the United Nations Trust Fund for Electoral Observation, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 46/137 of 17 December 1991, paragraph 14. The Trust Fund is a unique mechanism within the United Nations system that meets three specific needs: (a) it allows the Electoral Assistance Division to meet demands that are unexpected and that were not included in the budget for the previous biennium; (b) it covers the Division's "research and development" function — providing for the consolidation and systematization of lessons learned, which in turn lead to the development of new approaches and pilot programmes also supported by the Trust Fund; and (c) it provides funds on an emergency basis for a first rapid response to electoral requests, in particular when UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are unable to provide such funding.

60. The provision of sufficient resources, both staffing and financial, is essential to allow the Electoral Assistance Division to fulfil its General Assembly mandate to meet every request, and therefore to maintain the consistency of approach that guarantees the integrity of electoral assistance.

B. Future plans and reflections

61. In any given country, an electoral process requires the coordination of a large number of other political and non-political processes, relating to, for example, educational, judicial, and security systems. In order for a national election to be successful, all of these must work together at the culminating moment of the election. This is no less true for United Nations electoral assistance, which calls for a high degree of coordination between diverse agencies such as UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Member States have often urged the United Nations to be more effective in coordinating its activities; electoral assistance is one area in which this has been achieved to a significant degree. The roles of the various parts of the United Nations system have been clearly defined, and a decade of experience and lessons learned have greatly improved the practical implementation of these cooperation modalities.

62. It is therefore all the more important that the United Nations maintain this level of cooperation, enabling it to continue to provide in the future, as it provides now, clear procedures for the requesting of electoral assistance, and clear responsibilities for its implementation. The rising complexity and number of demands will, however, tax the existing architecture of cooperation. If this architecture is not strengthened through the provision of additional resources and capacity, the increasing burden could eventually weaken it, and electoral assistance would be at risk of becoming less constant, less effective and of a lower quality. As was stated in the previous report, electoral assistance provided by the United Nations continues to be extremely successful, and continues to be threatened by that very success.